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Text: Ephesians 2:8-10

The Unconverted “Believer” (16): The Good Works of True Believers (2)

Last Lord’s Day I had intended to set forth in one sermon this very important subject, “*The Good Works of True Believers*.” However, we had only addressed about half the pages of notes that were prepared, when we felt the need to stop rather abruptly at an appropriate place at which we could pick up today. But last week we were able to reinforce several foundational truths regarding the nature of our salvation that are set forth in Paul’s epistle to the church at Ephesus. The passage of Ephesians 2:1-10 clearly teaches that God saves His people by His sovereign work, not ours. He saves sinners by His sovereign grace through creating and sustaining faith in them toward Him in what He has purposed and accomplished through His Son, Jesus Christ. But the major thrust of what we emphasized was the purpose for which God saves His people. All too often the gospel of salvation is presented only in terms of God forgiving sinners of their sins so that they may escape hell and enter heaven. This is a truncated “gospel” that is one of the major causes for the problem of much nominal Christianity¹ in our world. But God has a far greater purpose and design for those whom He saves from sin than that they only escape His condemnation due to their sin. As set forth in Ephesians 2:8 through 10, we read that God has saved His people for the purpose that they live lives characterized by good works. Here again are those verses:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰***For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works***, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Of course the Scriptures teach that we are not saved by our works, but we were saved so that our lives would be characterized by good works as God has revealed them to be in His Word. Jesus Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Tit. 2:14). Good works are not the ground of our salvation, the life and work of Jesus Christ is the ground for our salvation. Good works are not the means of becoming saved, faith is the instrumental means that God uses. Salvation is through faith alone. But good works characterize saved people. This is so much so that good works are one of the evidences of having become truly saved by the grace of God (cf. 1 John 2:3). The true believer has repented of “dead works”, which are all those ways of living independent of God’s will that he had pursued through his own effort according to his own desire and design. Now, as a saved man, he produces “good works” as he lives for and before God. And these works performed by the true believer, which are produced by God’s grace through faith, will be judged at the last judgment demonstrating the reality and legitimacy of his faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Whether or not we inherit salvation will be through the Lord’s judgment of our works at the final judgment of mankind.²

And so, after last week affirming that (I) God saves us by His sovereign work, not ours, and (II) that God has created His people so that they would live characterized by good works, we may now consider...

III. The nature of the “good works” that characterize true Christians?

¹ A nominal Christian is a Christian in name only, but who has never experienced the life-transforming grace of God in biblical salvation.

² See Romans 2:5-11; Revelation 20:11-15.

What are the “good works” that God’s Word reveals should characterize Christians? ***First, good works are those that are in accordance with the will of God.*** The doxology of Hebrews describes these works:

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, ²¹make 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. (Heb. 13:20f)

These works are the obeying and fulfilling God’s will as set forth in the Holy Scriptures. In other words, the moral law of God set forth in the Holy Scriptures prescribe the kind of works that God regards as “good”, which should be performed by His people. John wrote, “The world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17).

The standards or commandments devised of men that are not taught in the Word of God cannot be said to be “good works” in the sight of God. We read in Matthew 15 the words of our Lord Jesus in which He repudiated the “commandments of men”, declaring that God only regards the worship that is in accordance to His commandments.

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ²“Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”

³He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ⁴For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ ⁵But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God’— ⁶then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. ⁷Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

⁸“These people draw near to Me with their mouth,
And honor Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.

⁹***And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.***” (Matt. 15:1-9)

We may conclude that the Lord’s standards for living were the commandments of God, but not the commandments of men. All “works” that are said or thought to be “good works” that are not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures, are not good works in the sight of God.

Today this principle is commonly disregarded. Many people think that God is pleased and accepts the devotion of anyone who is genuinely sincere no matter what form that devotion takes. It is thought that God approves of such “good works.” But this is not true. The Jews had a zeal for God, but that zeal was without knowledge (Rom. 10:2). It was that zeal that moved them to crucify Christ and persecute His people. Fervent devotion apart from sound doctrine is to worship God in vain.

Second, in order for someone to perform good works that God recognizes and accepts, those works must be done from obedience to God with the right biblical motives. This means that only the works performed by true Christians can be regarded as truly good in the sight of God. Our confession of faith speaks to this:

“Works done by unregenerate (unconverted) men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner according to the word, nor to a right end, the glory

of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, nor make a man meet to receive grace from God, and yet their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing to God.”³

Only true Christians can produce what the Bible regards “good works” in the sight of God. Our Lord declared that the way that His disciples could be identified and distinguished from those who were false was by the “fruit” of their lives, in other words, by their good works. He spoke of the impossibility of an unregenerate man to bring forth fruit unto God. But at the same time He suggested that it would be a commonplace to see fruit produced in the lives of His disciples. He declared these words in His Sermon on the Mount:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Even so, *every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.* ¹⁸*A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.* ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (Matt. 7:15-20)

It is important for us to understand that when we speak of the need and importance to produce good works that these works must be performed according to what Christians have historically referred to as “*evangelical obedience*”, not due to “*legal obedience*.” This involves the right motivation for keeping God’s laws, or commandments. We are to obey God’s commandments because we love God. Legal obedience is the desire and motivation to obey God’s commandments due to fear of God’s punishment rather than due to love for God. Legal obedience is enslaving and powerless to transform a person to become holy before the Lord. When we are converted to Christ, we are to shift our understanding of our desire and motivation for obedience to God’s commandments. We are to obey God because we love God, but further, we obey God for this is what it is to love God. Sadly, too many Christians still cling to a sense of legal obedience rather than evangelical obedience. And sadly, anyone of us can fall into this wrong way of thinking. We are not to obey God out of fear of what God might do to us if we fail to do so; rather, we are to obey God out of love for who He is and for what He has done for us in Christ. Those moved to obey through legal obedience will continue in misery and defeat. But when we become saved from our sin through the love of God manifest to us by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, we are to embrace the spirit of evangelical obedience.

We have referred in the past to the classic puritan writer on this subject, **Samuel Bolton** (d. 1654). In his book, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, he set forth the nature and role of the law of God for the New Testament believer.⁴ Here are Bolton’s words that address the transition that we undergo when we are converted to Christ to live according to evangelical obedience, not legal obedience:

Previously (before conversion), the principles of obedience were legal and servile, now they are filial (as in a family) and evangelical. As the law was given with evangelical purposes, so it is now kept (obeyed) from evangelical principles, principles of faith, love, and delight, which causes the soul to obey, and facilitates the whole of obedience. The love of Christ constrains (2 Cor. 5:14), yet is the obedience free. Love knows no difficulties; things impossible to others are easy to them that love. The grounds of obedience differ: heretofore, fear, now love. Previously the strength was our own; now we have fellowship with the strength of Christ. Our works are said to be wrought in God, by union with Him (John 3:21), and by fellowship with Him. As we can do nothing without Him, so we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. And this strength He has promised: The Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people, as He hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all His commandments’ (Deut.

³ See 2 Kings 10:30; 1 Kings 21:27, 29; Gen. 4:5; Heb. 11:4, 6; 1 Cor. 13:1; Matt. 6:2, 5; Amos 5:21f; Rom. 9:16; Tit. 3:5; Job 21:14f; Matt. 25:41-43. This statement is from **The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**, Art. 16, par. 7.

⁴ **Samuel Bolton** (1606-1654) wrote a classic book entitled, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*. In this book he had a section in which he identified nine differences between evangelical obedience and legal obedience. These are listed at the end of these notes.

26:18). He tells us that He works all our works in us and for us (Isa. 26. 12), the required works of grace in us, and of duty for us.

The ends before were for justification and life⁵; now they are for other ends - to glorify God, to dignify the Gospel, to declare our sincerity, to express our thankfulness. Before, we obeyed, but out of compulsion of conscience; now we obey out of the promptings of nature, which, so far as it works, works to God, as naturally as stones move downward or sparks fly upward. Thus, then, it is that we preach the law, not in opposition to, but in subordination to the Gospel, as we shall show at length later.

And then unto all believers, Bolton wrote:

Lastly, under this head, let me exhort you all to judge of the law aright, and then let it be your care to maintain it. Let not Moses take the place of Christ; but, at the same time, make a right use of Moses. When works and obedience take their right place, when the law is rightly used, then it is holy, just and good. But if we use it as our life⁶, then we trample the blood of Christ underfoot, and make His life and death in vain. Let the servant follow the Master; let Moses follow Christ; the law, grace; obedience, faith; and then all act their proper and designed parts. Remember what Zacharias said: You were redeemed that you might serve' (Luke 1:74), that you might live unto Him that died for you. Reason from mercy to duty, not from mercy to liberty (license). O beware that the great things of Christ do not make you more careless! Take heed not to abuse mercy. It is a sad thing when Christians abuse the grace of Christ. The justice of God prevails with others; oh, but God would have His tender mercies prevail with you: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice' (Rom. 12.1). The reasonings of saints are to be from engagements of mercy to enlargements in duty (2 Cor. 5:14 and 7. 1). Having such precious promises, let us purge ourselves from all corruptions of the flesh and spirit. None but venomous spirits will, spider-like, suck poison from such sweets, or draw such inferences from mercy as may be encouragements to sin. It would be a sad matter if believers should grow more slack and sluggish; if that which should quicken them slackens their hands; if a man should say in his heart, Christ died, I need not pray so much; Christ has done all, therefore I need do nothing. The doctrine we advance should strengthen and not weaken your engagement to duty, should heighten and not lessen your engagement to duty; it should quicken and not deaden your hearts' affections; it should inflame and not cool your spirits.

Third, our ability to do good works unto God is due to His grace working in us by means of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible for fallen man to order his life consistently according to the direction of Scripture apart from experiencing the new birth and being enabled by the Holy Spirit to live for God. We read of this in Romans 8:2-8.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ***that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us*** who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷Because ***the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.*** ⁸So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁵ What he meant by this is that before we were saved, we were under the covenant of works, that God required perfect and complete obedience to His law in order to be saved. Of course no sinner can do so because of his own sin and because of Adam's sin; therefore, Jesus Christ had to keep the covenant of works on behalf of His people whereby He secured their salvation.

⁶ In other words, wrongly thinking that by our obedience we are earning or gaining our life.

Paul declared that it was not possible for an unregenerate person to be subject, that is, willingly obedient, to the law of God. He is averse to God ordering his life according to His moral law. He has no true interest, desire, or ability to keep the law of God. The unconverted person cannot be subject to God's law. But the true Christian can be and will be. God saved Him through Jesus Christ in order for "*the righteous requirement of the law*" to be fulfilled in him. This is how our confession states this:

Christians' ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ; and that they may be enabled thereunto, besides the graces they have already received, there is necessary an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit, to work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure; yet they are not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty, unless upon a special motion of the Spirit, but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them. (John 15:4, 5; 2 Cor. 3:5; Phil. 2:12f; Heb. 6:11f; Isa. 64:7)⁷

Of course we should understand that though the Word of God tells us that Christians are characterized by good works and that He places a new and holy nature in us that aspires to knowledge and conformity to God's law so that we will manifest good works, that does not mean that it is an easy task for us to accomplish. Christians must realize and acknowledge that they are powerless to do the will of God apart from the continual bestowal of the power of the Holy Spirit. To read further in Romans 8, we may take note that Paul wrote of this struggle of the Christian to live a holy life even while it is absolutely necessary that he does so. Here is Romans 8:9-13:

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

¹²Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³***For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*** ¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Here we read that it is absolutely essential that we live manifesting good works in our lives. In order to do this we must not live according to the flesh, that is, to indulge sin, to do our own will. Rather, we must put to death those deeds, that is, we must repent of our sinful actions. But this is only made possible "by the Spirit." As we call upon Jesus Christ our Lord to enable us to live for Him and not for our sin, we ask Him to empower us with the Holy Spirit to strengthen us to resist temptation and to order our lives in obedience to the will of God, that is, to His righteousness. If we rely on our own resolve or love, we will fail. But if we rely in faith upon the Lord to give us His enabling power by the Holy Spirit, He will enable us to put to death the sinful deeds of the body.

Because only true Christians can truly do "good works" before God, it exposes and convicts those who are without Christ, who are still in their sin. **Thomas Manton** (1620-1677) in his sermon on Ephesians 2:10 wrote the following of the unsaved, to which this doctrine may be applied:

For the reproof of many professing Christians, who are not more prepared for the Lord and made ready for every good work. Alas! Some are 'to every good work reprobate,' Titus 1:16, unfit for any Christian practice. In others, all their holiness standeth in being less vicious or wicked than others. If they avoid greater crimes, though they freely practice the less, they are accounted good men. Some talk, but do nothing, like cypress trees, tall and beautiful, but unfruitful; or the carbuncle, afar off seeming all on fire (red), but the touch discovers it to be key-cold: their zeal is more in their tongues than their actions. Others are very un-ready, arguing for mediocrity, disputing every inch with God, beating down the price of religion as low as they can, as little worship and charity may be, and will do no more than

⁷ **The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**, Art. 16, par. 3.

needeth, and it is well if they do that. True goodness, like live honey, droppeth of its own accord, 2 Cor. 8:2; and is always desirous to do more for God: Psa. 71:14, ‘I will praise Thee more and more.’⁸

Fourth, the Holy Scriptures describe and define the good works of God’s people to be of five different kinds. These were presented by **Thomas Manton** in the sermon mentioned above:

1. Acts of God’s immediate worship, both internal and external. The internal acts are faith and love, trust, delight, reverence. External, as to pray, read, hear, to be much in communion with God in all parts of worship. Without works of piety we are practical atheists. God’s people do certainly make conscience of these: the internal acts are the life of their souls; the external are their solace, strength, and support, their songs in the house of their pilgrimage, their refreshing in the way.

2. Every man must labor in the work to which he was called (i.e. in secular work too). God is pleased to appoint and accept the duties of our calling as a good work. To be profitable to human society in your place is good; the new nature helpeth us to be.

3. Works of righteousness and justice, to hurt no none, to give every one his due, to use fidelity in our relations. The credit of religion (true Christianity) is much concerned in the just dealing of them that profess it. God would have the world know that religion is a good friend to human society... In short, they that do not make conscience of paying their debts, and using justice, equity, and honesty in all their dealings, are robbers, thieves, and enemies to human society.

4. As to relieve the poor, to be good to all, to help others by our counsel or admonition... Now if you do not mind (attend to) this kind of good works, you are unfaithful stewards in the good things committed to your trust. You must not deny God His own when He or any of His have need of it.

5. I think there is another sort of good works which concern ourselves, and that is, sobriety, watchfulness, mortification, self-denial. A man oweth duty to himself: Titus 2:12, “Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly.” These conduce to our safety.⁹

IV. The true believers’ “good works” are due to God’s grace of (progressive) sanctification.

In one of our earlier messages of this sermon series we stated that nominal Christianity is often the result of a truncated view of salvation promoted and believed by evangelicals. Many believe that salvation is limited to the sinner’s justification before God through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. People are told how they may obtain God’s forgiveness of their sins if they only believe on Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. But they were not taught that biblical salvation encompasses more than simply being saved from the guilt of our sins before God. This is what we stated on an earlier occasion:

Salvation is God’s rescue of the believer from the guilt and penalty of sin, but in addition, salvation entails much more. To limit one’s message and offer of salvation as only God’s forgiveness of sins, is not to proclaim a complete gospel. It has become a false gospel, for it no longer produces or results in biblical salvation of those who embrace it. Salvation is deliverance from sin in its entirety—yes, (1) from its penalty of condemnation and damnation. But in addition salvation delivers us (2) from the alienation of sin, (3) from the power of sin that dominated our thinking and living, and one day (4) from the very presence of sin when the Lord comes to receive His people unto Himself. And the gospel we proclaim must speak to this full scope of salvation.

⁸ Thomas Manton, **The Complete Works of Thomas Manton**, vol. 2 (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), p. 402.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 398f.

It is this third aspect of salvation that is shown forth in the life of a true believer characterized by good works. In short, the good works to which the God has saved us, are the result of His work of grace in our sanctification.

A. What is sanctification?

The basic idea of the sanctification of believers is that God has set them apart, that is, has separated them from the sinful practices of this fallen world in order to bring them unto the holy service of God. This is the essential idea of the verb, “sanctify”: to set apart; or to use a common biblical idea, to make holy. More precisely, the Holy Scriptures speak of our sanctification in two different ways or categories. These are commonly referred to as *definitive* and *progressive sanctification*.

Definitive sanctification¹⁰ speaks of what God does for His people when He first converts them unto Christ by His grace. In this sense definitive sanctification was “a once for all definitive act”; that is, He defined or declared each one of His people as His, whom He set apart for Himself when He converted them. 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 speaks of this state of sanctification of every true Christian:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,²
To the church of God which is at Corinth, *to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus*, called *to be*
saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:³
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

All true Christians are equally sanctified in this definite sense. It speaks of God having caused believers to have entered a new relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Most of what Paul wrote of believers in Romans 6 speaks to their definitive sanctification. He argues that the true believer in Christ has not only died with respect to his former life in sin, but that he has been raised with Christ unto newness of life. Paul set forth the spiritual truth that God has placed believers in a new relationship with Him, having severed their former identity with their sinful life and having translated them into new life in Jesus Christ. It is what God does for all true converts to Jesus Christ at the moment of their conversion.

Anthony Hoekema (1913-1988) addressed this from Paul’s epistles to the churches at Ephesus and Colossae.

Not only does Paul teach that believers have died to sin, he also affirms that they have been decisively and definitively raised with Christ. Using verb tenses that describe instantaneous, or snapshot, action, Paul asserts that “God...made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions... And God raised us up with Christ” (Eph. 2:4-6). Though we were by nature dead in sin, God mercifully made us who are believers one with the risen Christ, thus raising us up with Him; this “raising” is described here not as a long process but as something that happened at a certain point in time. The Colossians, furthermore, are not told that they must progressively be raised with Christ; they are told, “Since, then, you have been raised [aorist tense] with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). In light of these texts, we conclude that one’s sanctification means not only a decisive break with the enslaving power of sin but also a decisive and irreversible union with Christ in His resurrection, a union by means of which the believer is enabled to live in newness of life (Rom. 6:4) and because of which he or she has now become a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). As a result of our definitive sanctification, therefore, we who are in Christ must now count ourselves “dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11).

Clearly, therefore, the New Testament teaches definitive sanctification.¹¹

¹⁰ Sometimes called positional sanctification

¹¹ **Five Views on Sanctification**; the reformed view by Anthony A. Hoekema (Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), p. 73.

But we tend to more commonly think in terms of the **progressive sanctification** of true believers rather than definitive sanctification. The definition provided in **The Westminster Shorter Catechism** is very biblical and concise of progressive sanctification:

Question #35: What is sanctification?

Answer: Sanctification is the work of God's free grace¹², whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God¹³, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness¹⁴.

And so, progressive sanctification speaks of God *making* a person holy. The Holy Spirit imparts grace to the believer giving him/her both the desire and ability to do the will of God and become more Christ-like in life. It is a progressive work in that it is a gradual process that God works over a lifetime. It is a work of grace in that God performs this work in the lives of His people solely due to His kindness and love that He has for them. Through the grace of sanctification, the believer increasingly hates sin and ceases from it, and increasingly loves and practices righteousness. In other words, due to God's work of progressive sanctification in the true believer's life, his life is characterized by doing good works. Our sanctification will be complete when we pass from this life into the next and we are delivered from the sin that indwells us and we are perfected in holiness. And so, whereas definitive sanctification is a singular work of God *for* us, progressive sanctification is a progressive work of God *in* us. Definitive (or positional) sanctification occurred *once for all time* at the time of our salvation (or perhaps more specifically, when Christ Jesus purchased His people on His cross).¹⁵ Progressive sanctification is *a life-long process* in which God conforms our mind, affections, and will to Jesus Christ.

B. Progressive sanctification is the work of the Triune God.

The Scriptures ascribe the work of sanctification to the **Triune God**. There is a sanctification of believers by God the Father. There is a sanctification of believers by God the Son. There is a sanctification of believers by the Holy Spirit.

First, the Bible describes a sanctification of the believer attributed to **God the Father**. Jude 1 speaks of believers having been "sanctified by God the Father." This act of God sanctifying or setting apart believers took place in *eternity*. It speaks of their election by God the Father unto salvation. He set His own apart for Himself, separating them from all the rest. He "sanctified" them in the sense that He purposed to save them, bless them, and use them to glorify Himself in their salvation. This is definitive or positional sanctification.

Second, the Word of God speaks of a sanctification of the believer attributed to the **Son of God**. This speaks of Christ's work on their behalf in dying for them so that they might be set apart for God. God tells us in 1 Corinthians that Christ was made unto us sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). Hebrews 13:12 speaks of Christ sanctifying His people: "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate." The reason in the plan of God that Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem on the hill of Golgotha was to separate His people unto Himself. This work of the Son took place on Calvary when Jesus was crucified. This is also a matter of definitive sanctification.

Third, the Bible speaks of the sanctification of God the **Holy Spirit**. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in converting a sinner and transforming Him throughout his/her life until the day when the believer departs this world. This is found in a number of places. We might look at 1 Thessalonians 2:13f:

¹² Ezek. 36:27; Phil. 2:13; 2 Thess. 2:13.

¹³ 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:23,24; 1 Thess. 5:23

¹⁴ Ezek. 36:25-27; Rom. 6:4,6, 12-14; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Pet. 2:24

¹⁵ Or perhaps more specifically, when Christ Jesus purchased His people on His cross. Hebrews 10:14, "For by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified."

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through *sanctification by the Spirit* and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This sanctification by the Holy Spirit is also described in **1 Peter 1:1, 2:**

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, *in sanctification of the Spirit*, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

Here we see that it is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an elect person that results in the cleansing of sin and the willing compliance of the believer to Jesus Christ. Here we see that the sanctification of the Holy Spirit is not a *positional* matter, but rather a *practical* one. Yes, it is a work that the Father has purposed and that the Son is accomplishing in us through His authority as the crucified, risen, and enthroned King, but it is a work that is done by them through the agency of the Holy Spirit to which we want to direct our attention.

It is in the work of the Holy Spirit that...

C. Sanctification is the work of God purifying or making us holy in our lives.

Practical sanctification is the work of God in the life of the Christian whereby God makes the sinner into a holy person in thought, attitude and behaviour. This is why the true believer is characterized by “good works.” We may see this type of sanctification described or expressed throughout the Scriptures. For example, we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:3f, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.” Do you see how this is not a positional matter, but a practical one? It is not a work of sanctification that is done on our behalf as much *as it is a work of grace performed in each of us so as to purify us, making us holy, conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ.*

1. The sanctification of the Holy Spirit begins with the sinner’s regeneration. This work of sanctification by the Holy Spirit is when He causes a sinner to become born again. The Holy Spirit places within a spiritually dead, insensitive, uncaring, uninterested sinner, the principle of a holy life. It is described as a new nature, a new heart, a new man, and a new creation. The result of this sanctification of the Spirit is a whole new view of one’s self, one’s desires, and one’s purposes. The result of this imparting of new life is a whole new direction in life, one that establishes the sinner on the highway of holiness that will lead him unto everlasting life.

The sanctification of the Spirit is not a mere outward reformation of behaviour and appearance of conformity to the law of God, as say, characterized the Pharisees. The righteousness produced by the sanctification of the Spirit exceeds theirs, for it is internal, not only external. Nor is it a restraint from sin due only to a new and fearful realization of the wrath of God upon sin. Restraining grace need not be sanctifying grace. God sometimes restrains people from living in sin due to the influence of parents, church, and society’s laws. But this is not the sanctification of the Spirit.

The sanctification of the Spirit is not the same as the gifts of the Spirit. The gifts of a preacher, the gifts of someone who claims to have revelations from God or the power to heal, may accompany an unsanctified man. Paul wrote that some might speak with the tongues of men and angels and have no work of sanctifying grace in their hearts (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1ff).

The sanctification of the Spirit is not merely a moral renovation of one’s life. Sanctification may not be present in a man who gives up a sin or two, even many sins. Moral sinners need to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit as well as immoral ones. Those who are moral, however, do not see their need as greatly as the immoral. No, sanctification begins with the Holy Spirit imparting new life in the soul of a sinner resulting in a gradual and progressive transformation of his person into a holy man. It is a work of grace of the Holy Spirit in the soul of a sinner that results in his sanctification.

2. The sanctification of the Spirit is evidenced in the desires and attitudes of the believer toward God. What are the evidences of the sanctification of the Holy Spirit?

(1) There is *a new attitude and outlook of the soul toward God and the things of God*. There is a genuine desire and concern to know God, please God, and walk with God. Before, there was no fear of God before his eyes. But then, with the beginning of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, the desire and holy fear or reverence for God begins to capture his heart. He has a respect for God and God's name that he did not have before. He becomes concerned when he hears God's name dishonored or misrepresented. He becomes increasingly aware that his life is being lived out in the sight of God and that it matters to God how he not only behaves, but how he feels and thinks. He cannot do what he did before with a clear conscience. He finds himself doing things that he would have never considered doing before.

(2) There develops in his soul a true *love for God*. He finds himself delighting in God. He thinks of God. He talks with God. He wants to talk with others about God. Job wrote of the hypocrite, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?" But if that hypocrite ever becomes the object of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying grace, he will then do so.

(3) There develops in his heart and life *compliance to God's will*. He begins to understand and see the presence of an all-powerful God who has a purpose in this world acting in the affairs of his life. He murmurs less. He is distressed less. He is more at ease in difficult situations. He is less concerned for revenge or for demanding his own rights, for he has come to see that he is not deserving of the least of God's mercies. There is a conforming of his desires to God's desires. He finds himself loving the things God loves and hating the things God hates.

(4) He increasingly becomes *a thankful man*. **Thomas Watson** described the thankful man:

And as a godly man expresses thankfulness in every duty, he does so in every condition. He will be thankful in adversity as well as prosperity: 'In everything give thanks' (1 Thess. 5:18). A gracious soul (*i.e.* one which has been saved by grace) is thankful and rejoices that he is drawn nearer to God, though it be by the cords of affliction. When it goes well with him, he praises God's mercy; when it goes badly with him, he magnifies God's justice. When God has a rod in his hand, a godly man will have a psalm in his mouth. The devil's smiting of Job was like striking a musical instrument; he sounded forth praise: '*The Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord*' (Job 1:21).

(5) He becomes *a praying man*. He sees his dependence on the Almighty, and so, he makes his requests to God, knowing that He is able to give him the things for which he is truly needful. But it is not just a sense of need that sends him praying, it is a desire for communion with God that moves him to talk with God.

(6) He becomes a man *who seeks to be with God's people*. There is an attraction toward them that knits his heart with them. He desires and enjoys the Word of God preached and discussed. He belongs among them and feels at home with them.

(7) He becomes a man *who desires the glory of God*. The unsanctified man only acts holy before others to be seen of others. The sanctified man, however, shrinks from being seen of men. He desires that God's glory might increase, even if it means his own name decrease. His Christianity is not one of outward show so as to puff himself up in the eyes of others. He is content to do his good deeds in secret and see the recipient bless God for God's blessing.

3. The sanctification of the Spirit is evidenced in the desires and attitudes of the believer toward Jesus Christ. The person being sanctified by the Holy Spirit looks to Jesus Christ as his all in all. He sees a

sufficiency in the Lord Jesus for every spiritual need that he has--and they are many. He looks to Jesus for pardon and cleansing from sin. He looks to Jesus for comfort in his sorrow, strength in his difficulty, for encouragement in his distress. He looks to Jesus to guide and instruct him. He sees Jesus as His *Prophet*. He looks to Jesus to cleanse him of his guilt and pollution. He sees Jesus as His *Priest*. He subjects himself to Jesus as His Lord and orders his life according to his will. He sees Jesus as his *King*. The person becoming sanctified sees in Jesus all the perfections of grace that he desires for himself, so he desires and seeks conformity to him in thought, attitude, and action.

4. The sanctification of the Spirit is evidenced in the desires and attitudes of the believer toward the things of the Holy Spirit. Now a word of clarification is important here. When we say that the one being sanctified desires the things of the Spirit, we are not saying that the Spirit Himself is the focus of his attention. We say this because the Holy Spirit does not move men to seek Him, but rather He moves men to seek Christ. And so, it is “the things of the Spirit” that are desired by those who are being sanctified by the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:5; 1 Cor. 2:1). What do these things of the Spirit include?

(1) They desire to walk after the Spirit; that is, to walk in the way of holiness (Rom. 8:4).

(2) They look to the power of the Spirit to enable them to do the things commanded of them. God gave us the desire to please Him when we were born again. But He only gives us the power to do those things as the Holy Spirit enables us when the challenge arises and we look to Christ for the power of the Holy Spirit.

(3) They walk daily as they are being directed and taught by the Holy Spirit in the Holy Scriptures.

5. The sanctification of the Spirit is evidenced in the attitudes and opinions of the believer toward sin.

(1) Because he sees the Bible as God’s Word, the one being sanctified approves of what it says about sin and its penalty. He agrees with the word as to what defines sin. The unsanctified man cannot be subject to the law of God; it is not possible for him (Rom. 7:12). But the sanctified man cannot be otherwise. He approves of the Lord’s declarations in His law. He sees God’s law as holy, just, and good (Rom. 7:12).

(2) He hates sin and is grieved deeply by it. The world cannot know how the believer being sanctified by the Spirit feels toward the things that it wants him to approve and celebrate. They see our disapproval of sin as arrogant, bigoted, ignorant, and self-righteous. We are moved by blind fear and hatred, they say. No, we by the Spirit were made subject to the law of God in our innermost being and we cannot have it otherwise, nor would we want to have it so.

(3) The believer being sanctified hates sin most in himself. The unsanctified man does not hate sin in himself; rather, he cherishes it. Oh, he might be ashamed of it, but he loves it still. It has a power over him that leads him everywhere it would take him. Sin may have great influence in the life of the one being sanctified also, but he screams against himself as he is caught and drug to sin’s lair. He does not go willingly, but rather with regret and resistance.

(4) The sanctified man is concerned about his tongue, what he says. He knows that a fountain cannot send forth at the same place and time sweet water and bitter (James 3:11). When he sins with his tongue, he is smitten in his conscience.

(5) The sanctified man is concerned about his relationship with his brothers and sisters in Christ. His own peace is disturbed when peace between himself and others is disturbed.

(6) The sanctified man will seek to break off from his old sins and the places and people that would lead him into old sins. He strives against sin. It is warfare for him--spiritual battles—of which he does not always win. But when he does suffer defeat, he gathers himself up and enters the fray once again, waging the good warfare for Christ.

(7) The sanctified man loathes his weakness and failings. He is not as others who can easily justify themselves. He sometimes is thrown into despair because of the deepness of his remorse.

(8) He longs to be free from the power of sin in his life. If he had his wish, he would never sin again. He looks forward to the day when Christ returns and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit will be perfected in Him.

Do you not see how all of these characteristics cannot arise from anyone but that man or woman, boy or girl, who is being sanctified by the Holy Spirit? **John Gill** (1697-1771), from whom I gleaned many of these descriptions, said it this way:

Now can such actings in the mind, and in life, spring from nature? Must they not arise from a principle of holiness in the heart? Can there be such reverence of God, love to Him, resignation to His will, affectionate and fervent devotion to Him, desires of communion with Him, and a concern in all things for His glory, without a supernatural principle of grace and holiness in the soul? Is it possible, that an unsanctified man should ever apply to Christ for cleansing, be subject to Him as King, be desirous of walking as He walked, and of being wrought up to conformity to Him? Or be concerned to mind the things of the Spirit, and to walk after the Spirit, and to live in Him, and be careful not to grieve Him? Can there be such actings in the mind concerning sin, as to love the law, which forbids it; to dislike sin, abhor it, and hate it; engage in an opposition to it, abstain from it, lament it, and earnestly desire to be rid of it; can these be the produce of nature? Or be without being internally sanctified by the Spirit of God?

Of course the answer is “No.” The sinner must be the recipient of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit for these graces to be seen in the life.

6. The sanctification of the Spirit is progressive, in that we grow in the grace of sanctification through life. The manifestation of this work of sanctifying grace in the believer’s life is what results in the “good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2 Cor. 5:14)

From the
Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689

Chapter 16: Of Good Works

1. Good works are only such as God hath commanded in his Holy Word, and not such as without the warrant thereof are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretence of good intentions. (Micah 6:8; Heb. 13:21; Matt. 15:9; Isa. 29:13)
2. These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith; and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that having their fruit unto holiness they may have the end eternal life. (James 2:18, 22; Psa. 116:12, 13; 1 John 2:3, 5; 2 Pet. 1:5-11; Matt. 5:16; 1 Tim. 6:1; 1 Pet. 2:15; Phil. 1:11; Eph. 2:10; Rom. 6:22)
4. They who in their obedience attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to supererogate, and to do more than God requires, as that they fall short of much which in duty they are bound to do. (Job 9:2f; Gal. 5:17; Luke 17:10)
5. We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin or eternal life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come, and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom by them we can neither profit nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins; but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants; and because as they are good they proceed from his Spirit, and as they are wrought by us they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's punishment. (Rom. 3:20; Eph. 2:8, 9; Rom. 4:6; Gal. 5:22,f; Isa. 64:6; Psa. 143:2)
6. Yet notwithstanding the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreprovable in God's sight, but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections. (Eph. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:5; Matt. 25:21, 23; Heb. 6:10)