



“Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body; and in your spirit; which are God's” (I Corinthians 6:20).

SANCTIFICATION: The Holiness We Pursue

Central Truth for This Lesson

Grow in the holy nature of Christ.

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It is wonderful to be saved and to know that forever your life and your soul are in the hands of almighty God. It is a shame, however, to have that assurance and neglect the great salvation that God has given. The writer of Hebrews asks the question, *“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him . . . ?”* (Hebrews 2:3). Did the writer mean that if one is careless concerning his Christian life God will disown him? Certainly not! He did mean, however, that it is a serious matter to neglect the salvation that has been given and continue a lifestyle that is not in harmony with God's will.

The challenge before every believer is to pursue holiness. No one starts out being holy. Before becoming a Christian; every person is a non-believer and as such is aligned with the world and alienated from God. Paul taught that many people are guilty of sexual impurity, idolatry; dishonesty, covetousness, drunkenness; and other sins. Many who became believers were once caught up in such evil. But they were changed. The change did not come about because they suddenly decided to become good, but because God reached out and cleansed them. Paul said that God *“washed”* them, *“sanctified”* them, and *“justified”* them (I Corinthians 6:11). Even though they have been cleansed, sanctified, and justified, many new believers still have problems with sin in the flesh. How should one deal with such problems?

The key word claiming our attention in this lesson is the middle word Paul used in that passage — sanctified. What does it mean, and how does it come about? Earnest people with varying beliefs would answer those questions differently. It is, therefore, very important to let the Bible — not the thinking of man — inform us as to proper answers.

What Is Sanctification?

The simple definition of *sanctification* is “set apart.” It involves dedication to the services of God; and it is concerned with holiness in one's life. It is obvious that in a very real sense a person is “set apart” for God at the moment of salvation. When Paul wrote about sanctification, he did not separate being set apart from being washed by the blood of Jesus. He simply stated, “*But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified*” (verse 11). The entire process of becoming a Christian was linked together in Paul's theology.

From the moment of salvation, one belongs to the Lord. A saved person has been purchased by the blood of Jesus and, therefore, belongs to God (I Corinthians 6:20). At the moment of salvation, one is “set apart” for service and for fellowship with the Lord. When God makes His purchase, He does not just buy the soul; He buys the entire person. The purchase price He paid for the soul effectively purchased everything about the person. Therefore, a Christian should seek to glorify God both in the body as well as in the spirit.

In another sense there is a level of sanctification to which one who has been born again must aspire. One who has just been saved has just been rescued from the penalty of sin; the Christian journey which leads to being conformed to the image of Christ has just begun. A new believer must grow in the practice of all Christian virtues as the pilgrimage of the Christian life is experienced. Peter wrote, “*Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity*” (II Peter 1:5-7). As a believer grows in those virtues, his life will be fashioned more after the life of Christ.

How Does Practical Sanctification Come About?

While believers are brought into a state of positional sanctification at conversion, they must progress toward practical expressions of that position in their daily life. Jesus taught that believers are sanctified through truth.

“For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (John 17:19). As a believer grows in the knowledge of truth, he is better able to live a life that is truly set apart for God. Peter left no doubt but that such growth can be a part of the Christian experience. *“Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (II Peter 3:18).

Peter not only challenged believers to grow in grace and knowledge, but he also gave a formula for how that growth could be realized. *“Laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby”* (I Peter 2:1, 2). That passage shows that if a believer is to grow, not only must he desire to feed upon the Word of God, but he must also lay aside behaviors that prevent spiritual growth.

It is impossible for a person to grow in grace and knowledge when the heart is full of malice. *“Malice”* carries the idea of depravity. When a person lives a depraved life, he is separated from the virtues which produce a godly life. It is also impossible for a person to grow in grace and knowledge while living a life of guile and hypocrisies. *“Guile”* carries the idea of deceitfulness. A person full of guile can be described as crafty and deceitful, or as Jacob was described, doing things by subtlety (Genesis 27:35).

Peter also shows that spiritual growth is hindered when envy is allowed to be a part of one's thinking and feelings. *“Envy”* is closely related to holding ill will or harboring jealousy of others. When jealousy rears its ugly head, it claims all the energies of its victim and renders one powerless to experience the kind of spiritual growth necessary to have a close walk with God. Holding ill will gives rise to a person being guilty of backbiting and speaking evil of others. That practice embitters the spirit and makes growth in grace and knowledge impossible. If such things are laid aside, a person will be free to focus upon God's Word and in the heart *“desire the sincere milk of the word”* which enables growth in the Lord.

Paul dealt with the goal of Christian growth. He said, *“Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Romans 12:1, 2). Spiritual growth moves a person toward the goal of being free from the mold into which the world desires to press all its people. It also transforms one into the kind of person who lives more like Jesus with each passing day.

Paul taught that the goal of becoming like Jesus can be realized through the renewing of one's mind. Renewal begins when one experiences regeneration; the mind continues to be renewed as the person lays aside the

evil described by Peter and seeks the “*sincere milk of the word*” as vital nourishment. Are you on the road which leads you to a life which proves “*what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*”?

The Fruits of Sanctification

Paul described [in I Thessalonians 4] the fruits of sanctification. “*This is the will of God, even your sanctification*” (verse 3). He continued by identifying qualities which reflect practical sanctification:

- Avoiding fornication — “*Abstain from fornication*” (verse 3).
- Controlling your carnal desires — “*Everyone of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God*” (verses 4, 5).
- Dealing honestly and fairly with others — It is God's will that “*no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit*” (verses 6-8).
- Practicing brotherly love — “*Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more*” (verses 9,10).
- Leading a disciplined life — “*Study to be quiet*” (verse 11).
- Minding your own business - “*Do your own business*” (verse 11).
- Working — “*Work with your own hands*” (verse 11).
- Providing for your needs honestly — “*Walk honestly toward them that are without,*” and work so “*that ye may have lack of nothing*” (verse 12).

In I Thessalonians 5, Paul gave instructions as to how Christians within a church fellowship can encourage sanctification in each other. The following show the steps he urged the Thessalonians to take to promote sanctification among themselves.

1. “*Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another*” (verse 11).
2. “*Know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and . . . esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves*” (verses 12, 13).
3. “*Warn them that are unruly*” (verse 14).
4. “*Comfort the feebleminded*” (verse 14).

5. *“Support the weak”* (verse 14).
6. *“Be patient toward all men”* (verse 14).
7. *“See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men”* (verse 15).
8. *“Rejoice evermore”* (verse 16).
9. *“Pray without ceasing”* (verse 17).
10. *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”* (verse 18).
11. *“Quench not the Spirit”* (verse 19).
12. *“Despise not prophesyings”* (verse 20).
13. *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”* (verse 21).
14. *“Abstain from all appearance of evil”* (verse 22).

Paul was confident that if the Thessalonians would follow the fourteen points of his admonition, *“the very God of peace”* would *“sanctify [them] wholly”* (verse 23). He went even further, promising the Thessalonians that he would *“pray God [their] whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* and assuring them that *“faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it”* (verses 23, 24).

Because of the teachings of the Scriptures the churches of the Baptist Missionary Association of America have adopted the following statement of belief concerning sanctification:

All believers are set apart unto God (Hebrews 10:12-14) at the time of their regeneration (I Corinthians 6:11). They should grow in grace (II Peter 1:5-8) by allowing the Holy Spirit to apply God's Word to their lives (I Peter 2:2), conforming them to the principles of divine righteousness (Romans 12:1, 2; I Thessalonians 4:3-7) and making them partakers of the holiness of God (II Corinthians 7:1; I Peter 1:15, 16).