

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: SANCTIFICATION

The Meaning of Sanctification

1. *Those who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, have a new heart and a new spirit created in them; and by His word and Spirit dwelling within them, this personal work of sanctification is indeed carried further. All these blessings accrue to them by reason of the merits of Christ's death and resurrection. Sin's mastery over them is completely broken; the evil desires to which it gives birth are increasingly weakened and dealt their death-blow; and saving graces in them are increasingly enlivened and strengthened. The practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, is thus promoted.*

(a) The **subjects** of sanctification: "Those who are united to Christ, effectually called and regenerated." These blessings are necessary in order for the work of sanctification to go ahead.

(b) **Definitive** sanctification: This is an aspect of sanctification that takes place at the time of our conversion. So every Christian has experienced this definitive sanctification (see Acts 20:32, 26:18, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 6:11). This is why every Christian is called a 'saint' = a holy one (so Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Colossians 3:12, etc.). At conversion God frees us from the power of sin and He becomes our Master – read the great passage about this in Romans 6. The Confession puts it this way, "Sin's mastery over them is completely broken."

(c) **Progressive** sanctification: Although sin is no longer the master of the Christian, increasing obedience to Christ as the new Master is only gradually achieved. We must work out in practice the fact that we are now "dead to sin and alive to God" (Romans 6:11-13). So the Christian life is to be seen as a life of growth (Ephesians 4:15, 1 Thessalonians 4:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 1 Peter 2:2, 2 Peter 3:18). Sin is to be put to death (= mortification, Romans 8:13, Colossians 3:5). By the work of the Holy Spirit there is increasing fruit (Galatians 5:22-23).

(d) Sanctification is **essential**: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

Sanctification is a Battle

2. *Sanctification, as defined in this way, extends to every part of man, yet remains incomplete in this life. Sin's corrupt remnants continue to defile all parts of man, causing within him a continual warfare that does not admit of reconciliation; the flesh rises up against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh.*

Every part of the Christian was profoundly affected by sin (= total depravity). So also sanctification must extend to every part. But it will never be complete in this life. It is wrong for anyone to claim sinlessness (perfection) in this life (Philippians 3:12-14, 1 John 1:8-2:2). We will only be perfect when we receive new bodies in the resurrection. Until that time "sin's corrupt remnants" (also known as 'indwelling sin') remain in us so that the Christian life is characterized by opposition between the 'flesh' and the 'Spirit' (Galatians 5:16-17, see also 1 Peter 2:11). Before God begins to work in us sin reigns and all seems to be at peace. But when we become Christians the battle against sin starts, because of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. We are now very much aware of choices that have to be made in every sphere of life, for God or against God. This is one of the clearest evidences that we have become Christians.

Sanctification will be Completed

3. *In the war of flesh versus Spirit, sin's corrupt remnants may for a time gain the upper hand, yet the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ enables a man as a new creature to gain the victory. And so the saints grow in grace, moving on towards a fulness of holiness in the fear of God. They earnestly endeavour to live according to heaven's laws, and to render gospel obedience to all the commands which Christ, as their Head and King, has laid down for them in His word.*

(a) The flesh may dominate for a time. This is true to our experience and the lives of the saints in the Bible. David was overcome by the temptation to immorality; Peter was defeated by the temptation to deny his Master. So the Christian life will probably be characterized by 'ups' and 'downs'. A definite period of 'down' we call backsliding.

(b) The flesh will finally be defeated. Christ, by the power of His Spirit, will give each of His children sufficient strength to gain the victory. So the general direction of the Christian life will be 'upward'. Two things describe this growth towards a "fulness of holiness".

1. It is "in the fear of God". See 2 Corinthians 7:1, Hebrews 5:7.
2. It is "according to heaven's laws". Whatever God says in His word is followed. The Christian walks in the way Christ Himself walked (1 John 2:6, see Matthew 5:48). This is not obedience in order to be saved; but "gospel" obedience, which is the joyful and willing response of one who has already been saved by the gospel.