

Sanctification

Following from the previous session on justification, we consider this time a term which is often linked with it. Justification, remember, is to be made or, better, accounted righteous in God's sight. Sanctification is to be holy, to be set apart for God. The link between the two is clear; someone who is holy is surely righteous and vice versa. This close association has caused problems in understanding the differences between the two. We need to look carefully at how the word is used so as to avoid misunderstandings.

The Greek word translated "sanctification" is *hagiasmos* those of you who have been to Turkey may pick up the link with "Hagia Sophia" in Istanbul, the "Shrine of the Holy Wisdom of God". Vine's dictionary comments that it means both "*separation to God*" and "*the course of life befitting those separated to God*".

As with justification, it is God who sanctifies us, who sets us apart to his service. We can see this clearly in the Old Testament where it is God who spoke to Abram, sending him out and promising he would be blessed and be a blessing (Gen12:1-3). It was God who called to Moses from the burning bush and who commissioned him to go to Egypt and lead the children of Israel to freedom (Ex3:1-10). It was God who caused David to be anointed as king (1Sam16:1-13). Nowhere does anyone put themselves forward, it is always God who sets an individual apart. (Even Isaiah who answers God's question who to send, has been given a vision of God's glory, been cleansed and heard God speak **(Isaiah6:1-8)**). In the New Testament we are told that the Father sanctifies us.

"It is because of him (God) that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" 1Cor1:30

"And by that will (of God), we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Heb10:10

This sanctification comes about by the action or agency of the Holy Spirit. Look for example at **Rom15:16** and **1Cor6:13**.

"But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth" 2Thess2:13

"who have been chosen... through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient 1Pet1:2 (part)

And this is done in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the sacrifice of his body in willing obedience to the will of God (**Heb10:10**).

"But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." 1Cor6:13

So all three persons of the Trinity are involved in sanctification, but even so, unlike justification, this is not something which is done for us, we also have a part to play. Paul and Peter both write about this.

"Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" 2Cor7:1

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.”
2Pet1:5-7

This statement from Peter reads almost like a road map of sanctification, at least to the second aspect, that of living a life which is appropriate for those who have been saved. In a similar vein, there is a lot to be gained from reading and following the “instructions for Christian living” found in ***Ephesians4:17-5:20***

Some people are cautious about suggesting that any of this sanctification process is down to our efforts. They view the process as entirely the work of God in us and having nothing to do with our own efforts. They quote verses such as ***Rom6:14*** to show that we are not under law, but under grace and ***Heb7:18,19*** to show that the law cannot sanctify people. Both of these statements are true, but the first is written in the context of our justification and our position before God as righteous in Christ. The second is contrasting the weakness of the old law and covenant, and the priesthood and system of sacrifice, with the new law and covenant, and priesthood and sacrifice, of the Lord Jesus. Further on in this teaching the writer notes that God has said in relation to this new covenant,

“I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts” Heb8:10

These laws are the same moral laws which Jesus affirmed and clarified in ***Matthew 5-7***, the “Sermon on the Mount.” We are not to set aside God's commands, but to teach them. We find many commands and instructions in the New Testament and we are expected to respond in obedience. God is pleased when we do good works, he prepared them for us to do! (***Eph2:10***). Sanctification is indeed a work of God, but it is one in which he invites us, indeed commands us to participate.

Sanctification, then is an on-going process in believers as they engage in a continuous struggle against sin. It is dependent both on the power of God at work in us and on our willing obedience to the action of the Holy Spirit to change our nature from the old (the fleshly nature) to the new (the spiritual nature). This begins at the moment of our salvation and continues throughout our life until God completes it at the coming of Jesus. Sanctification has both a negative aspect “***put off the old self***” and a positive one “***put on the new***”.***Eph4:20-24***.

The Holy Spirit empowers us in our struggle against the old nature and in our efforts to live by the spirit. In addition, God has given us other means.

Reading, hearing, understanding and meditating on the Bible

Prayer brings us deeper in relationship to God

Fellowship encourages us to put others above ourselves

Giving is a practical way of orienting our aims to God's will

Sharing the Gospel means we participate in the building of God's kingdom

All of these bring us closer to God, reflect the ways in which Jesus behaved and confirm our desire to follow God. All of these are effective by the power of the Holy Spirit in sanctification.