

Sanctification, Part 2 of 3

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Six Characteristics of Sanctification

1. Sanctification is *not* by works/obedience/law/rules.

Rom. 7:5, 7-11, 24; 8:3a

Walter Marshall: "The end of Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection was to prepare and form a holy nature and frame for us in Himself, to be communicated to us by union and fellowship with Him; and not to enable us to produce in ourselves the first original of such a holy nature by our own endeavors" (*Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, p. 40)

Gal. 3:1-3; Col. 2:20-23

"They that would cure [the flesh] and make it holy by their own resolutions and endeavors do act quite contrary to the design of Christ's death, for He died, not that the flesh, or old natural man, might be made holy, but that it might be crucified, and destroyed out of us (Rom. 6:6), and that we might live to God, not to ourselves, or by any natural power of our own resolutions and endeavors, but by Christ living in us, and by His Spirit bringing forth the fruits of righteousness in us" (Marshall, pp. 179).

Gal. 5:22-23

2. Rather, it is a gracious, supernatural work of God the Holy Spirit.

2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2

A common error is to believe that justification is God's part and sanctification is our part. No, just as justification is the work of God's free grace *for us*, so sanctification is the work of God's free grace *in us*.

Rom. 8:4 (divine passive); 1 Thes. 5:23

The covenant of redemption: "To all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, he does certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same" (WCF VIII.8).

What are the benefits of redemption that Christ has purchased?
Regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, glorification.

Heb. 13:20-21

WLC 75. "What is sanctification? Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God has, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of his Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise unto newness of life."

Notice that in the above definition, there is no mention of what we must do. It all God's work.

Phil. 1:6; 2:13

3. But that does not mean we are entirely passive – sanctification is by faith.

Acts 26:18; 2 Thess. 2:13

Marshall: "Faith in Christ is the duty with which a holy life is to begin, and by which the foundation of all other holy duties is laid in the soul" (p. 43).

Marshall: "Because all the blessings and perfections of our new state – as justification, the gift of the Spirit, and of the holy nature, and the adoption of children – are seated and treasured up in Christ and joined with Him inseparably, we can receive them no further than we receive Christ Himself by faith" (p. 173).

James Fraser of Alness: "... of how great importance it is, to preach the special doctrine of the gospel, the doctrine of faith; and that, not only in order to give sinners encouragement respecting free justification, but also with regard to sanctification. The Gospel, the doctrine of faith, is the special truth of God and of divine revelation; this is the great means of sanctification" (*A Treatise on Sanctification*, p. 463).

William Romaine called faith "the great spring of all gospel obedience" (*The Life, Walk, and Triumph of Faith*, p. 156).

We must not view faith as a one-time thing. As long as we live in this world, we must continue in faith and become stronger in faith.

Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:23; 2:6-7

Faith is like a muscle. The more you use it, the more you will be able to feed upon Christ.

4. Sanctifying faith means reckoning that we are dead to sin and alive unto God in union with Christ.

Indicative: Rom. 6:1-11; 2 Cor. 5:14-17; Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 3:1-4

John Murray: "We are compelled to reach the conclusion that it is by virtue of our having died with Christ, and our being raised with him in his resurrection from the dead, that the decisive breach with sin in its power, control, and defilement has been wrought, and that the reason for this is that Christ in his death and resurrection broke the power of sin, triumphed over the god of this world, the prince of darkness, executed judgment upon the world and its ruler, and by that victory delivered all those who are united with him from the power of darkness, and translated them into his own kingdom. So intimate is the union between Christ and his people, that they were partakers with him in all these triumphal achievements, and therefore died to sin, rose with Christ in the power of his resurrection, and have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 289).

Reckoning by faith: Rom. 6:11; 2 Cor. 5:16

Herman Ridderbos: "What [Paul] wants to teach [the church], over against the reality of sin, is beyond anything else a new basis for self-judgment in its belonging to Christ and having died and been raised with him. As he says in 2 Corinthians 5, that henceforth ... he will know no man 'after the flesh,' but will understand him as participating in the new aeon and the new creation ... The new life of believers is not a matter that can be known or approached out of the inwardness of the spiritual life, but only out of what has taken place in Christ's death and resurrection. Their life is in Christ" (*Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, pp. 209, 213-4).

5. The negative side of sanctification is the mortification of the flesh.

Rom. 6:6; 8:13; Gal. 5:24; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:5

John Owen: "Mortification of sin is peculiarly from the death of Christ. It is one peculiar, yea, eminent end of the death of Christ, which shall assuredly be accomplished by it. He died to destroy the works of the devil ... Let faith look on Christ in the gospel as he is set forth dying and crucified for us. Look on him under the weight of our sins, praying, bleeding, dying; bring him in that condition into thy heart by faith; apply his blood so shed to thy corruptions; do this daily ... The Spirit alone brings the cross of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing power" (*Works*, vol. 6, "Of Mortification of Sin," pp. 19, 83, 85, 86).

6. The positive side of sanctification is being transformed by the Spirit into the image of Christ.

Rom. 8:4, 9-11, 29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:16-17; 4:22-24; Titus 3:5

Charles Hodge: How is a soul gradually transformed into the image of Christ?

"*First*, it is led to exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ... This is the first step, and secures all the rest

"*Second*, the soul by this act of faith becomes united to Christ. We are in Him by faith. The consequences of this union are, (a) Participation in his merits.

His perfect righteousness ... is imputed to the believer. He is thereby justified ... (b) Another consequence of the union with Christ effected by faith, is the indwelling of the Spirit ... Where the Spirit is, there Christ is; so that, the Spirit being with us, Christ is with us; and if the Spirit dwells in us, Christ dwells in us. In partaking, therefore, of the Holy Ghost, believers are partakers of the life of Christ

"*Third*, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit thus secured by union with Christ becomes the source of a new spiritual life, which constantly increases in power until everything uncongenial with it is expelled, and the soul is perfectly transformed into the image of Christ ... The Spirit ... especially opens the eyes to see the glory of Christ ... This apprehension of Christ is transforming; the soul is thereby changed into his image, from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord. It was this inward revelation of Christ by which Paul on his way to Damascus was instantly converted from a blasphemer into a worshipper and self-sacrificing servant of the Lord Jesus" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. III, 226-9).

In sum:

Everything we need with regard to sanctification – victory over sin, empowerment to obey, the powerful work of the Spirit – all of these things are found in Christ. Christ is the storehouse, the treasury of sanctification. He is the fountain of the springs of living water. Therefore, we can only enjoy these benefits of sanctification to the degree that we hold fast to the Head, to Christ himself, by faith. You cannot get these things apart from Christ. If you try to get victory over sin, or if you try to obey, apart from Christ, you will fail. But if you go to Christ first by faith, then you will receive victory, power, obedience, and everything else that you need to grow in holiness.

Col. 2:19

Marshall: "Believers while they are on earth have all perfections of spiritual blessings, justification, adoption, the gift of the Spirit, holiness, eternal life and glory, in and with Christ (Eph. 1:3). In the person of Christ, who is now in heaven, the old man is perfectly crucified; they are dead to sin and to the law and its curse, and they are quickened together with Him, and raised up with Him, and made to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6). And believers do in their own persons receive and enjoy by faith all these perfect spiritual blessings of Christ, as far as they receive and enjoy Christ Himself dwelling in them, and no farther" (p. 176).

Ridderbos: "Because Christ is their life, it has also gone with Christ to heaven, it is also hidden with Christ in God, and it waits for its revelation at the appearing of Christ from heaven. The church, so far as its life on earth is concerned, is determined, governed, nourished from heaven" (p. 214).