

Having considered effectual calling, conversion, justification and adoption, today we will consider sanctification.

1 What is sanctification? (WSC Q.35)

Answer: Sanctification is the work of God's free grace,¹ whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God,² and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.³

¹ **2 Thessalonians 2:13.** God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and of the truth.

² **Ephesians 4:23-24.** And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

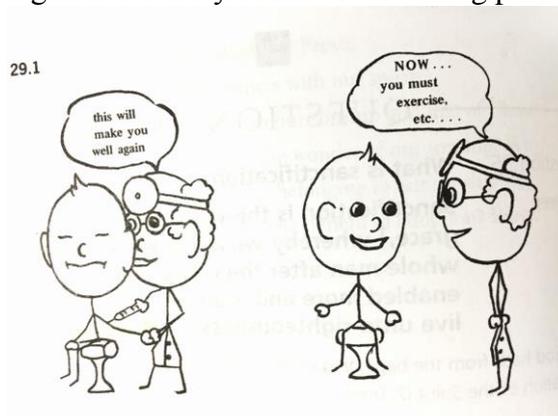
³ **Romans 6:4, 6, 14.** Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. . . knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. . . For sin shall not have dominion over you: **Romans 8:4.** That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

2 Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, not merited by any men.

- a) God sanctifies man, but man is active and responsible in the process of sanctification.
- b) We are to “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling” because it is God who “worketh in [us] both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Phil 2:12-13).
- c) How can sanctification be the work of God, and yet at the same time, a work of man?

3 Basic Aspects of Sanctification.

a) Sanctification begins with an inward change - regeneration. Put off the old man; put on the new man (Col 3:9-10). The whole nature of man is renewed, but is not made perfect or complete in one act. Example 1: a baby is a new creature, but it has a long way to go before it becomes a full-grown mature human adult. Eg.2: when a man has a disease and receives an effective drug that destroys the virus, the man has been delivered from the power of that disease. But he will still have a long way to go before he is completely strong and well. In the same way, when a man is regenerated, he is no longer under the dominion of sin, and yet the power of sin is not completely gone. The *effects* of the disease (original sin) is still there. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in which the “new nature” more and more gets the victory over this remaining power of indwelling sin.



b) The Work of Sanctification is gradual. Unlike justification which is a one-time act, sanctification is a gradual process – every Christian is a “work in progress.” Hence there is a constant conflict with sin. As John said, “every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he ‘the Lord’ is pure” (1 Jn 3:3). A regenerated man cannot live in peace with sin (1 Jn 3:6-9). For “whosoever is born of God doth not commit [or habitually practice] sin; for his [‘God’s] seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” (1 Jn 3:9). When a man’s heart has been changed and conforming to the image of Christ, sin cannot possibly have the dominion. Yes, the believer will sin. But he will never

say, "It is all right." He will never want to sin, and always be fighting against sin because he hates his own sin. Hence Paul says in Rom 7:7-25 that he often does what he does not want to do, and does not do what he wants to do. But is he happy with this situation? No, he says he feels wretched, as sin wars within. But the wonderful thing is that he knows he has the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a slow process, but it is certain.

- c) The work of sanctification is synergistic i.e. a work in which man cooperates with God; a work in which both man and God are active. It does not mean that the work of man is equal to the work of God. No, the work of God is such that God gets all the credit for man's sanctification. And the work of man is never more than "an unprofitable servant":
- i. God is working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, and
 - ii. we are working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12-13).
We must purify ourselves, but it is God alone who enables us to do it.

4. **The Proof of Sanctification.**

- a) The true believer loves God and loves to keep the law of God (1 Jn 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous). The Apostle John says, everyone who does righteousness is born of God (1 Jn 2:29). Although the true believer does not keep the law perfectly (1 Jn 1:8, 10), he strives to do it so that he might not grieve God. And God enables him to more and more keep it. Hence the Scriptures says, faith without works is dead (James 2:20). Eg. A living plant grows both downward and upward: invisibly (roots) underground and visibly (branch, leave, flower, fruit) above ground-the inward grace from regeneration produces the outward fruits of true conversion.
- b) The true believer will do good works out of his love, gratitude and faith in Christ. The unbeliever may do things that appear to be good works, and may even put money into the offering bag in church. Yet there is a world of difference:
- i. The true believer is glad that God requires the high and holy things, whereas the unbeliever is not.
 - ii. The true believer does good works out of gratitude, but the unbeliever is always trying to do good works to earn God's favour, or to prove his own goodness or merits.
 - iii. The true believer knows that his 'best works' will never be perfect. But the unbeliever does not realize this, and thinks his good works are acceptable to God, and is satisfied with what he has done.
- c) Humility is the greatest virtue in those who are being sanctified.
- i. As we study the lives of great men in the Bible such as Moses, David, Peter and Paul, we find that they fought against sin in their lives and become more holy, and yet they become more aware of their unworthiness before God.
 - ii. The more they become more holy, the more they feel themselves to be sinners. This is the paradox. But it is not difficult to understand.
 - iii. Imagine a man who has fallen into the mud on a dark night. At a distance, he sees a great light and begins to see how dirty he is. He begins to wash off the dirt as he walks toward the light. The nearer he gets to the light, the more dirt he sees on himself and he tries to get rid of more dirt. Yet because he is getting nearer to the light, he is able to see more clearly how dirty he really is.
 - iv. So it is with those who are being sanctified by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is constantly showing them more and more of the Lord Jesus and the holiness and love of God. Yet they are seeing more clearly their own sins, and how far they are from the holy standard of God. They feel more and more that they are unworthy sinners who need the grace of God. This is the reason why the holiest men were also the humblest men. They were dying more and more unto sin, and living more and more unto righteousness. Yet they could see that they were sinners saved only by the grace and mercy of God!

Sanctification is not a process whereby we go higher and higher until we feel we can stand before God feeling that we are holy people. Rather it is a process where we go lower and lower in our estimate of self, while at the same time desire above all that we might be holy. For it is only in genuine humility that we become holy!