

26 QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD BE ASKING!

QUESTION #17: WHAT IS SANCTIFICATION?

Q. What is sanctification? Why does it matter to me?

A. Sanctification, as a doctrine, could be described as ‘becoming what you are’ and it’s all about growing in holiness. To understand that better, we’ll explain how the word is used in the Bible, what the doctrine is, and why it’s important to know!

1. HOW IS THE WORD USED IN THE BIBLE?

In common usage, ‘to sanctify’ means ‘to set apart to special use; especially used of priests or items in the temple.

Lev 21 ⁶ They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God. For they offer the LORD's food offerings, the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy. ⁷ They shall not marry a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled, neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband, for the priest is holy to his God. ⁸ You shall sanctify him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I, the LORD, who sanctify you, am holy.

‘Sanctify’ is the verbal form of the word for ‘holy.’ To sanctify, then, means ‘to make holy.’ J.I. Packer says that if there was such a verb as ‘holify,’ then we wouldn’t need ‘sanctify.’ Likewise, if ‘sanct’ was a legitimate adjective it would mean about the same thing as ‘holy.’ To be sanctified carries the idea of becoming like God who is holy for the purpose of serving him.

2. WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION?

The Bible speaks of sanctification in at least two ways and it is important to know the difference. The difference is largely with regard to time: it may refer (a) to our state as ‘sanctified’ (God has *already* set us apart for holy purposes), or, (b) to our growth in sanctification (that is, *becoming* more and more holy; conforming our actual lives to the purposes for which he has called us).

A. HOW THE BIBLE GENERALLY SPEAKS OF BEING SANCTIFIED

(TRUTH)

When God saves sinners, he declares definitively why he has done so; namely, so that we might be set aside for his holy purposes and that our lives might reflect his holiness (Matt 5.14-16, 43-48; Acts 20.32; 2 Thess 2.13; Heb 10.10).

John 17 ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I [sanctify] myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

1Cor 6 ⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. 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.

B. HOW SANCTIFICATION IS LIVED OUT

(HUMILITY)

Our task as Christians is ‘to grow more and more in sanctification, just as [we] previously grew more and more in sin’ (Grudem). This doctrine is everywhere present even when the word ‘sanctification’ is absent.

Rom 6 ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. ... ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. (cf. Rom 12.2; 2 Cor 3.18; Eph 4.11-15; Phil 1.9-11; 3.12-21; Col 1.9-12; 1 Pet 2.1-3; 1 Pet 1.14-16; 2 Pet 1.5-8)

This growth in holiness will continue throughout this life... in other words, sin remains as long as we live (Matt 6.12; Jas 3.2; 1 John 1.8). Our growth in holiness will continue until it is perfected at the consummation of all things (Eph 5.25-27; Heb 12.23; 1 Jn 3.2-3). This is necessary, since nothing even partially impure may be in God's presence. This means that our souls *and* bodies will be sanctified in that great day (see Rev 21.27; cf. 1 Cor 15.49; Phil 3.20-21).

3. JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION: UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

A. JUSTIFICATION

- *Legal* change from guilt to innocence
- *Once* for all time at conversion
- *Perfect* in this life—manifested at judgement
- *Same degree* in all Christians
- Has to do with our *standing*

B. SANCTIFICATION

- *Moral* change of behaviour and attitudes
- *Continuous* from conversion on
- *Progressive* in this life—perfected at judgement
- *Differing degrees* in Christians
- Has to do with our *state*

4. IT MATTERS: ENCOURAGEMENT

A. YOU HAVE A PURPOSE: YOU WILL GIVE GLORY TO THE FATHER

(TRUTH)

Matt 5¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

B. YOU WILL BE VICTORIOUS: ONE DAY YOU WILL BE LIKE CHRIST

(DELIGHT)

*1John 3¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. ...
² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

C. YOU ARE NOT ALONE: THE SPIRIT IS THE ONE AT WORK IN YOU EVEN NOW

(FREEDOM)

1Thess 5²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. (cf. Rom 15.16; Gal 5.16; Eph.5.18; 2 Thess 2.13)

5. APPLICATION

A. TRUTH

Isn't it interesting that all the means of grace God has given us to grow in holiness are centred on the truth? Bible reading and meditation (Ps 1.2; 19.7-13; 2 Tim 3.16-17; etc.), obedience to biblical commands (1 Thess 4.3; Rom 6.19, 22), prayer (Ps 51.10; Eph 6.18; Jude 20), worship (Eph 5.18-20), and fellowship (Prov 13.20; Heb 10.24-25) are all based on truth.

B. HUMILITY

Even though I'm set apart by the Father and being indwelt actively conformed by the Spirit to the image of the Son, I'm still so far from perfect. How deeply rooted must my sin be! What great motivation to poverty of spirit!

C. DELIGHT

What God has started, God will finish. The holiness for which I long (to see, to experience, to be!) will be mine.