

Chapter XXII: Sanctification and Perseverance

The doctrine of justification naturally leads on to that of sanctification. The state of justification calls for a life of sanctification, consecrated to the service of God.

1. Nature and Characteristics of Sanctification

Sanctification may be defined as that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit by which, He purifies the sinner, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works. It differs from justification in that it takes place in the inner life of man, is not a legal but a recreative act, is usually a lengthy process, and never reaches perfection in this life. While it is very decidedly a supernatural work of God, the believer can and should co-operate in it by a diligent use of the means which God has placed at his disposal, 2 Cor. 7:1; Col. 3:5-14; 1 Pet. 1:22. Sanctification does not consist in a mere drawing out of what is already given in regeneration, but serves to strengthen, to increase, and to fortify the new life. It consists of two parts: the gradual removal of the pollution and corruption of human nature, Rom. 6:6; Gal. 5:24, and the gradual development of the new life in consecration to God, Rom. 6:4, 5; Col. 2:12; 3:1, 2; Gal. 2:19. While it takes place in the heart of man, it naturally affects the whole life, Rom. 6:12; 1 Cor. 6:15 20; 1 Thess. 5:23. The change in the inner man is bound to carry with it a change in the outer life. That man must co-operate in the work of sanctification follows from the repeated warnings against evils and temptations, Rom. 12:9, 16, 17; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Gal. 5:16-23, and from the constant exhortations to holy living, Micah 6:8; John 15:4- 7; Rom. 8:12, 13; 12:1, 2; Gal. 6:7, 8, 15.

2. The Imperfect Character of Sanctification in This Life

While sanctification affects every part of man, yet the spiritual development of believers remains imperfect in this life. They must contend with sin as long as they live, 1 Kings 8:46; Prov. 20:9; Jas. 3:2; 1 John 1:8. Their lives are characterized by a constant warfare between the flesh and the spirit, and even the best of them are still confessing sin, Job 9:3, 20; Ps. 32:5; 130:3; Prov. 20:9; Isa. 64:6; Dan. 9:7; Rom. 7:14; 1 John 1:9, praying for forgiveness, Ps. 51:1, 2; Dan. 9:16; Matt. 6:12, 13; Jas. 5:15, and striving for greater perfection, Rom. 7:7-26; Gal. 5:17; Phil. 3:12-14. This truth is denied by the so-called

Perfectionists, who maintain that man can reach perfection in this life. They appeal to the fact that the Bible commands believers to be perfect, Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16; Jas. 1:4, speaks of some as perfect, Gen. 6:9; Job 1:8; 1 Kings 15:14; Phil. 3:15, and declares that they who are born of God sin not, 1 John 3:6, 8, 9; 5:18. But the fact that we must strive for perfection does not prove that some are already perfect. Moreover, the word 'perfect' does not always mean free from sin. Noah, Job, and Asa are called perfect, but history clearly proves that they were not without sin. And John evidently means either that the new man does not sin, or that believers do not live in sin. He himself says that, if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1 John 1:8.

3. Sanctification and Good Works

Sanctification naturally leads to a life of good works. These may be called the fruits of sanctification. Good works are not perfect works, but works that spring from the principle of love to God or faith in Him, Matt. 7:17, 18; 12:33, 35; Heb. 11:6, that are done in conscious conformity to the revealed will of God, Deut. 6:2; 1 Sam. 15:22; Jas. 2:8, and have as their final aim the glory of God, 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17, 23. Only they who are regenerated by the Spirit of God can perform such good works. This does not mean, however, that the unregenerate cannot do good in any sense of the word. Cf. 2 Kings 10:29, 30; 12:2; 14:3; Luke 6:33; Rom. 2:14. In virtue of the common grace of God they can perform works that are in external conformity to the law and serve a laudable purpose; but their works are always radically defective, because they are divorced from the spiritual root of love to God, represent no real inner obedience to the law of God, and do not aim at the glory of God. In opposition to the Roman Catholics it should be maintained that the good works of believers are not meritorious, Luke 17:9, 10; Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:5, though God promises to reward them with a reward of free grace, 1 Cor. 3:14; Heb. 11:26; and in opposition to the Antinomians the necessity of good works must be asserted, Col. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:21; Titus 2:14; Heb. 10:24.

4. Perseverance of the Saints

The expression 'perseverance of the saints' naturally suggests a continuous activity of believers whereby they persevere in the way of salvation. As a matter of fact, however,

the perseverance referred to is less an activity of believers than a work of God, in which believers must participate. Strictly speaking, the assurance of man's salvation lies in the fact that God perseveres. Perseverance may be defined as that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion. This doctrine is clearly taught in Scripture, John 10:28, 29; Rom. 11:29; Phil. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18. And it is only when we believe in this perseverance of God that we can in this life attain to the assurance of salvation, Heb. 3:14; 6:11; 10:22; 2 Pet. 1:10. Outside of Reformed circles this doctrine finds no favor. It is said to be contradicted by Scripture, which warns against apostasy, Heb. 2:1; 10:26, exhorts believers to continue in the way of salvation, Matt. 24:13; Col. 1:23; Heb. 3:14, and even records cases of apostasy, 1 Tim. 1:19, 20; 2 Tim. 2:17, 18; 4:10. Such warnings and exhortations would seem to assume the possibility of falling away, and such cases would seem to prove it completely. But as a matter of fact the warnings and exhortations prove only that God works mediately and wants man to co-operate in the work of perseverance: and there is no proof that the apostates mentioned were real believers. Cf. Rom. 9:6; 1 John 2:19; Rev. 3:1.

To memorize: Passages to prove:

a. Sanctification as a work of God:

1 Thess. 5:23. "And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Heb. 2:11. "For both He that sanctifies and they that are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren."

b. Man's co-operation in sanctification:

2 Cor. 7:1. "Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Heb. 12:14. "Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord."

c. The mortification of the old man:

Rom. 6:6. "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away, so that we should no longer be in bondage to sin."

Gal. 6:24: "And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof."

d. The quickening of the new man:

Eph. 4:24. "And put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth."

Col. 3:10. "And have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created him."

e. Sanctification incomplete in this life:

Rom. 7:18. "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not."

Phil. 3:12. "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus."

f. The nature of good works: I Sam. 15:22. "And Samuel said, Hath Jehovah as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

1 Cor. 10:31. "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Heb. 11:6. "And without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him."

g. Perseverance of the saints:

John 10:28, 29. "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who hath given them unto me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand."

2 Tim. 1:12. "For which cause I suffer also these things: yet am I not ashamed; for I know Him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

2 Tim. 4:18. "The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto His heavenly kingdom: to whom be the glory for ever and ever."

For Further Study:

- a. Can you infer anything from the following passages as to the time of complete sanctification? Phil. 3:21; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 14:5; 21:27?
- b. What parts of man does sanctification affect according to Jer. 31:34; Phil. 2:13; Gal. 5:24; Heb. 9:14?
- c. What does the word 'perfect' (cf. Auth. Ver.) mean in the following passages: 1 Cor. 2:6; 3:1, 2; Heb. 5:14; 2 Tim. 3:16?

Questions for Review:

1. What is sanctification, and how does it differ from justification?
2. Is it a work of God or of man?
3. Of what two parts does sanctification consist?
4. What proof is there that it is incomplete in this life?
5. Who deny this and on what ground? How can you answer them?
6. What are good works in the strict sense of the word?

7. In how far can the unregenerate perform good works?
8. Are good works meritorious or not? Are we not taught that they are rewarded?
9. In what sense are good works necessary?
10. What is meant by the perseverance of the saints?
11. How can this doctrine be proved?