

Sanctification

**“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.”
(I Thessalonians 4:3)**

In the King James translation there are 32 New Testament entries for various forms of the word sanctification. It is a doctrine of primary importance in the Christian's life. Very few items are so explicit as to say, “THIS is God's will for you.” But sanctification, as quoted above, is one of those few.

The word and the doctrine are about purification, holiness, consecration. To a human being, the words can be frightening. But they are not meant to be. The concept of sanctification is the concept of learning to think anew—anew by human standards, but by Scripturally-directed spiritual standards. As Paul writes (Romans 12:2), “Be ye TRANSFORMED by the renewing of your mind.” This is what keeps a Christian separate from the world, pure from its influences, holy (in the sense of complete because of spiritual understanding) as opposed to carnal or worldly thinking, and consecrated in the sense of devotion to God's will only. It has been expressed that sanctification is being SET ASIDE to the service of something higher. But paramount in the doctrine is the idea of GROWTH. A Christian does not simply accept the JUSTIFICATION provided by belief in Christ's righteousness; he must add to that justification a transformation of character to be made like Christ. Sanctification is a PROCESS; it IS GROWTH; it is MATURING in spiritual understanding and application. As Paul said, it is a total RENEWING of the mind.

The Scriptures frequently provide lists to show how we grow through this sanctification process. Three examples will suffice to make the point.

(1) In Galatians 5:22-25, Paul shows that the Holy Spirit in our lives will develop fruitage. As with fruit on a tree, character ripening takes time.

(2) In James 3:17, 18, the Apostle shows those character traits that constitute spiritual wisdom. As with human wisdom, these traits are developed through instruction and experience.

Both of the above lists are preceded by lists of contrasting human traits—things we possess before the process of sanctification works to eliminate them.

(The Apostle Peter speaks of sanctification (II Peter 1:4-8) by speaking of our work of ADDING spiritual strengths one at a time based on THE PROMISES OF GOD.

God has no desire to deal with our fallen, imperfect humanness. When He accepts us in Christ, he considers our wills to serve him (instead of our humanity) as the beginning of something new—something to which (if we are faithful) he will give ultimately a new spiritual body. Paul (II Corinthians 5:17) says it this way:

**“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:
old things are passed away; behold, all things
are became new.”**

There may be times or circumstances when we can feel inadequate or overwhelmed by the concept of sanctification in our lives—of being “saints.” But as time progresses and we see the hand of God in our experiences and in our instruction, we can learn to rejoice in and to anticipate anything and everything in our lives that eventuates in making us more Christ-like.

If we love God and Christ, we can only rejoice in every effort toward sanctification. Since it is God’s will for us, how can we do otherwise?

There is a secret ingredient to sanctification. It is TRUTH. Only truth sanctifies. Error does not sanctify; it corrupts. Therefore, every disciple must constantly be searching and appropriating the Word of God, the Bible, to be able to discern what makes Christ-likeness. Before he died, Jesus offered a prayer on our behalf. In it are the beautiful words: “Sanctify them through thy truth; Thy word is truth.” The whole context (John 17:14-26) stresses that this sanctification will set us apart from the world to the extent that the world hath hated them because they are not of the world.”

If we are faithfully submitting to the sanctification process, the truths which we know and practice will be such a threat to the world’s ways and standards that we will be outcasts—even if we personally are liked by those who know us. TRUTH is such a threat to error that the bearers of truth are scorned. TRUTH is such a threat to our own human natures, that it will fight actively against the sanctification process of our “new mind(s).” That is why the Apostle Paul admits his struggle to keep his flesh, his body, his old humanity, under the control of his “new creature.” (I Corinthians 9:26, 27)

The sanctification process is seen mostly by ourselves because it is an inner work. However, those who walk the “narrow way” with us, who also are growing through sanctification, will see and appreciate signs of the work going on in other saints. The world in general, if it sees anything, will tend to misinterpret, be suspect of, and scorn what it does see in us. Peter suggests that we can rejoice in this witness of the spirit that we are, indeed, being sanctified. (I Peter 3:14-18; 2:19-21)