

Living so as to please God; on becoming sanctified (1)

Introduction:

This morning in our study of 1 Thessalonians we arrive to the fourth chapter, in which the apostle set forth instruction to Christians on how to live so as to please God. In the first paragraph of this chapter, verses 1 through 8, Paul gave instruction and exhortation to increase more and more in arena of holy living. Paul was not giving them new instruction, for he had already taught them in these matters. He was exhorting them to do more and more in things that he had already taught them. Let us read verses 1 through 8.

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ²For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

Paul declared to his readers that he was asking and urging them on behalf of the Lord Jesus to take action, that is, He said that his exhortation to them was as actually the Lord Himself exhorting them through him. **Verse 1** reads, “Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you *in the Lord Jesus*.” Jesus Christ is the Lord of His people. He is the One who leads and instructs His people, and He had chosen to do so through His apostle. Paul’s words were the words of the Lord Jesus to His people.

We recognize that the words of the apostles recorded for us in the New Testament are the Words that the Lord Jesus speaks to us through them. We embrace this understanding of the Word of God, just as those in the church at Thessalonica had done so, whom Paul described earlier,

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. (1 Thess. 2:13)

Here in verse 1 Paul declared that the words of his epistle to this church were words “in the Lord Jesus”, for the Lord Jesus inspired the apostle to write the words that are before us.

Note that the apostle addressed these Christians on very familiar terms. He wrote, “Finally, then, *brothers*, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus.” He regarded them as intimate friends, even family members. They were brothers and sisters in the Lord. He wrote to them with great respect for them for he had great regard for them.

The apostle both asked and urged his readers to follow his instruction. He asked them, but that did not seem sufficient for him, so he both asked and urged them to heed his words. The word translated “urge” is sometimes translated as “exhort” or even “beseech.” Paul was pressing upon them very strongly that they show regard and readily receive his instruction, for it was an important matter.

What was it to which they were to give their attention? Paul wrote, “as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.” Paul had instructed them in these matters before they had received his teaching in this epistle. Before they received

this letter Paul had instructed them on how to live before God in a manner that pleased Him. He had taught them before and they had previously received, or had embraced this teaching. Moreover, they had put into practice his earlier teaching. He wrote, “just as you are doing.” He had instructed them on how to walk in order to please God; they had received his teaching, and they had put into practice his teaching. But now he urged them and asked them to continue in this way of living, that they would do so “more and more.”

We see from these words that there is some instruction regarding our Christian living that needs to be repeated before us. Even though we have been taught the truth and even though we have applied the truth, we are still in need of being reinforced in that instruction that would direct us in a Christian life that pleases God. The reason for this need of repetition of teaching, and this reminder by means of exhortation, is that our thinking and our living are subject to stagnation and even erosion from where we once were. We tend to fall short of where we should be. We tend to become less attentive and less diligent with the passing of time. We should be farther ahead than where we are presently in our Christian walk. I suspect that most of us should probably be more advanced in the quality of our Christian life than we currently are. The writer of Hebrews wrote of his readers:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (Heb. 5:12)

Paul had previously instructed these Christians. They had received his instruction. They were even living in accordance with his earlier instruction. Yet he saw the need to ask and exhort them to abound “more and more” in this matter. **John Calvin** wrote of this:

They had previously learned what was the rule and method of a pious life: he calls this to their remembrance. *As,* says he, *ye have been taught.*

Lest, however, he should seem to take away from them what he had previously assigned them, he does not simply exhort them to *walk* in such a manner, but to *abound more and more*. When, therefore, he urges them to make progress, he intimates that they are already in the way. The sum is this, that they should be more especially careful to make progress in the doctrine which they had received, and this Paul places in contrast with frivolous and vain pursuits, in which we see that a good part of the world very generally busy themselves, so that profitable and holy meditation as to the due regulation of life scarcely obtains a place, even the most inferior. Paul, accordingly, reminds them in what manner they had been instructed, and bids them to aim at this with their whole might.

The instruction that the Lord has given us in the past, whether it be through our own reading of the Scriptures or through hearing God’s Word taught and proclaimed to us, should always be governing our lives. But further, there is a need to always improve our obedience to the things we have learned in the past.

In **verse 2** the apostle appealed to them, “For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.” Again, Paul reminded them that he was not teaching them something new. He also reminded them that the instruction that he had originally given to them was indeed the instruction of the Lord Jesus. “For you know what instructions we gave you *through the Lord Jesus*.”

In **verse 3** Paul became more specific regarding his instruction. He wrote, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” Paul stated that it was God’s design that His people would become sanctified. It is as though he were saying, “This is God’s end, or purpose for you Christians, that you become sanctified.”

I. What is sanctification?

In this context, sanctification means to grow or increasingly to become holy in one’s life. Calvin described the believer’s sanctification in this way:

“that renouncing the world, and clearing ourselves from the pollutions of the flesh, we offer ourselves to God as if in sacrifice, for nothing can with propriety be offered to Him, but what is pure and holy.”

The basic idea of the Christian being sanctified is that he/she has been set apart, separated by God for God. Everything that belongs to God is to be *set apart* for Him. We read in the Old Testament that the tabernacle, the articles of furniture in the tabernacle, the utensils used in the tabernacle, the priests themselves who ministered in the tabernacle, were all sanctified for that purpose. They were set apart for God and His worship. In the same way God sanctifies every Christian. Each and every believer is one who has been singled out by God from the human race. All who belong to Jesus Christ have been sanctified. We have been separated, set apart, sanctified in the mind of God from all others. We who are in Christ stand in a covenant relationship with God, for God chose us and set us apart from the world as a unique people. In the mind and purpose of God we are separate (sanctified) from the fallen world and He has glorious and vastly different designs for us apart from those whom He has not sanctified. We are to live our lives as sanctified people, ones set apart from sin and from the fallen world, resolved to live for our God.

Now when we speak of the sanctification of the Christian, we should understand that Christians are sanctified in two different ways. The Scriptures speak about Christians being sanctified both **positionally** and **practically**. We are probably most familiar with the idea of **practical sanctification**. This was what Calvin was describing in his definition above. Practical sanctification is also addressed in the **Westminster Shorter Catechism**:

Question #35: What is sanctification?

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

Practical sanctification speaks of God transforming a Christian into a more holy Christian, one who increasingly becomes more and more like Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit imparts grace to the believer, giving him/her both the desire and ability to do the will of God and to become more and more Christ-like in life. It is a continual and progressive work in that it is a gradual process that God produces over a lifetime. It is a work of grace in that God performs this work in the lives of His people solely due to His kindness and love that He has for them. Through the work of sanctification, the believer increasingly hates sin and ceases from it, and increasingly loves and practices righteousness. Our sanctification will be complete when we pass from this life into the next and we are delivered from the presence of sin in our lives.

But **positional sanctification** is distinct from practical sanctification. This positional sanctification occurred once for all time for each of us at the time of salvation, or, perhaps more specifically, when Christ Jesus purchased His people on His cross. We were purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ and set apart as the unique people of God. **Hebrews 10:14**, “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”⁴

II. What is Christian sanctification like?

¹ Ezek. 36:27; Phil. 2:13; 2 Thess. 2:13.

² 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:23,24; 1 Thess. 5:23

³ Ezek. 36:25-27; Rom. 6:4,6, 12-14; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Pet. 2:24

⁴ This is the verse that years ago convinced me of the truth of “limited atonement” espoused by Reformed theology rather than the universal atonement taught by Arminians. Arminians say that Jesus Christ died equally for all the world’ Reformed theology (Calvinism) says that Jesus Christ died so as to secure the redemption of His people. The Arminian teaches that Jesus secured the redemption for no one, but only made possible the salvation of everyone. But the Calvinist teaches that Jesus Christ actually secured the salvation of His people, not simply making salvation possible for them. This verse in Hebrews 10:14 proves the Reformed view of the atonement is taught in Holy Scripture.

Let us consider sanctification from several perspectives.

A. Sanctification is the experience of all true Christians.

Please turn in your Bibles to **Acts 20:32**. Paul had stopped at the port of Miletus, not too far south of the city of Ephesus. He desired to visit with the elders of the church at Ephesus while he briefly set into port. He sought to encourage and to warn these elders of their responsibilities and of the dangers that were before them. Some even among themselves would become corrupt in their desires and their thinking respecting the faith. They all were to be on guard over one another and watch themselves closely. As Paul was ready to depart from them, he gave them this parting word of exhortation:

And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you *an inheritance among all those who are sanctified*. (Acts 20:32)

He urged these elders to be true to God and to the message of God's grace (as found in the Scriptures). He tells them that their seeking to walk with God and their commitment to the "word of grace" would be the means that God would cause them to grow in holiness and maturity. This would result in the realization of their blessed hope—the inheritance of salvation and eternal life. Paul describes the inheritance of these men as belonging to "all those who are sanctified." Here we see, therefore, that *sanctification is the experience of all true Christians*. You will not receive the inheritance of eternal life unless you are sanctified.

In another place in Acts Paul asserted the same truth. In Acts 26 we read of Paul defending himself before King Agrippa. Paul had been arrested due to the opposition of Jewish leaders who had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. They had levelled a number of false charges against Paul, resulting in Him standing in judgment before this regional king in the coastal city of Palestine, Caesarea. In Paul's defence he describes his conversion experience when the risen and glorified Jesus appeared to him and spoke to him while he was travelling to Damascus. We read of the Lord's purpose and calling upon Paul in **Acts 26:17f**. Jesus had told Paul,

I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, *that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me*.

Here again, we see that "an inheritance", which is eternal life that comes through salvation, belongs to "those who are sanctified." We have an additional word from our Lord about the means that God uses to sanctify His people. Jesus describes them as sanctified "by faith in Me"; that is, God sanctifies His people through the means of faith in Jesus Christ. But the point we wish to stress is this: only sanctified persons will receive the inheritance of eternal life. *Sanctification is the experience of all true Christians*.

Each of us who are truly Christians in the biblical sense of that word are undergoing a work of grace in our lives that the Bible refers to as our **sanctification**. This is the will of God being accomplished in every Christian. We have in our text of **1 Thessalonians 4:3**, "*For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.*"

B. The cause of Christian sanctification

The Scriptures speaks of the causes of our sanctification in different ways. The historic **Westminster Confession of Faith** describes it this way:

(1) "The *moving* cause of sanctification is the grace of God." It is of God's free will and purpose that we are sanctified apart from any merit of ourselves.

(2) “The *meritorious* cause is the blood and righteousness of Christ.” Any and all work of Christ is performed due to Christ and what He performed for us through His life and death.

(3) “The *efficient* cause is the Spirit of God.” The Holy Spirit is the one who does the work of sanctification in us.⁵

1. Sanctification by the Triune God.

The Scriptures ascribe the work of sanctification to the **Triune God**. There is a sanctification of believers by God the Father. There is a sanctification of believers by God the Son. There is a sanctification of believers by the Holy Spirit.

First, the Bible describes a sanctification of the believer attributed to **God the Father**. Jude 1 speaks of believers having been “sanctified by God the Father.” This act of God sanctifying or setting apart the believer took place in *eternity*. It speaks of their election by God the Father unto salvation. He set His own apart for Himself, separating them from all the rest. He “sanctified” them in the sense that He purposed to save them, bless them, and use them to glorify Himself in their salvation.

Second, the Word of God speaks of a sanctification of the believer attributed to the **Son of God**. This speaks of Christ’s work on their behalf in dying for them so that they might be set apart for God. God tells us in 1 Corinthians that Christ was made unto us sanctification.

Hebrews 13:12 speaks of Christ’s sanctifying His people: “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.” The reason in the plan of God that Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem on the hill of Golgotha was to separate His people unto Himself. This work of the Son took place on Calvary when Jesus was crucified.

Third, the Bible speaks of the sanctification of the **Holy Spirit** of God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in converting a sinner and transforming Him throughout his/her life until the day when the believer departs this world. This is found in a number of places. We might look at 1 Thessalonians 2:13f:

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through *sanctification by the Spirit* and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This sanctification by the Holy Spirit is also described in **1 Peter 1:1, 2**:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, *in sanctification of the Spirit*, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an elect person results in his cleansing from sin and his compliance to the will of Jesus Christ. Here we see, therefore, that the sanctification of the Holy Spirit is not a *positional* matter, but rather a *practical* one. Yes, it is a work that the Father has purposed and that the Son is accomplishing in us through His authority as the crucified, risen, and enthroned King, but it is a work that is done by them through the agency of the Holy Spirit to which we want to direct our attention.

It is in the work of the Holy Spirit that...

2. The sanctification of the Holy Spirit begins with the sinner’s regeneration.

This work of sanctification by the Holy Spirit commences when He causes a sinner to become born again. The Holy Spirit places within a spiritually dead, insensitive, uncaring, uninterested sinner, the principle of a holy life. It is described as a new nature, a new heart, a new man, and a new creation. The

⁵ These quotes are taken from the excellent work by Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Emerald House Group, 1998, p. 325-7. The article on these pages also generated other thoughts in this message.

result of this sanctification of the Spirit is a whole new view of one's self, one's desires, and one's purposes. The result of this imparting of new life is a whole new direction in life, one that will lead the sinner on the highway of holiness that will lead him into everlasting life.

The sanctification of the Spirit is not a mere outward reformation of behaviour, and appearance of conformity to the law of God, as say, the Pharisees. The righteousness produced by the sanctification of the Spirit exceeds theirs, for it is internal. Nor is it a restraint from sin due only to a new and fearful realization of the wrath of God upon sin. Restraining grace need not be sanctifying grace. God sometimes restrains people from living in sin due to the influence of parents, church, and society's laws. But this is not the sanctification of the Spirit.

The sanctification of the Spirit is not the same as the gifts of the Spirit. The gifts of a preacher, the gifts of someone who claims to have revelations from God or the power to heal, may accompany an unsanctified man. Some might speak with the tongues of men and angels and have no work of sanctifying grace in their hearts (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1ff).

The sanctification of the Spirit is not merely a moral renovation of one's life. Sanctification may not be present in a man who gives up a sin or two, even many. Moral sinners need to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit as well as immoral ones. Those who are moral, however, do not see their need as greatly as the immoral.

No, sanctification begins with the Holy Spirit imparting new life in the soul of a sinner resulting in a gradual and progressive transformation of his person into a holy man. It is a work of grace of the Holy Spirit in the soul of a sinner that results in his sanctification.

3. The sanctification of the Spirit is evidenced in the desires and attitudes of the believer toward God. What are the evidences of the sanctification of the Holy Spirit?

(1) There is *a new attitude and outlook of the soul toward God and the things of God*. There is a genuine desire and concern to know God, please God, and walk with God. Before, there was no fear of God before his eyes; but then, with the beginning of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, desire and a holy fear or reverence begins to capture his heart. He has a respect for God and God's name that he did not have before. He becomes concerned when he hears God's name dishonoured or misrepresented. He becomes increasingly aware that his life is being lived out in the sight of God and that it matters to God how he not only behaves, but feels and thinks. He cannot do what he did before with clear conscience. He finds himself doing things that he would have never considered doing before.

(2) There develops in his soul a true *love for God*. He finds himself delighting in Him. He talks with God and thinks of God. He wants to talk with others about God. Job wrote of the hypocrite, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?" But if that hypocrite ever becomes the object of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying grace he will.

(3) There develops in his heart and life *compliance to God's will*. He begins to understand and see the presence of an all-powerful God who has a purpose in this world acting in the affairs of his own life. He murmurs less. He is distressed less. He is more at ease in difficult situations. He is less concerned for revenge or for demanding his own rights, for he has come to see that he is not deserving of the least of God's mercies. There is a conforming of his desires to God's desires. He finds himself loving the things God loves and hating the things God hates.

(4) The one being sanctified increasingly becomes a *thankful man*. **Thomas Watson** described the thankful man:

And as a godly man expresses thankfulness in every duty, he does so in every condition. He will be thankful in adversity as well as prosperity: '*In every thing give thanks*' (1 Thess. 5:18). A gracious soul (*i.e.* one which has been saved by grace) is thankful and rejoices that he is drawn nearer to God, though it be by the cords of affliction. When it goes well with him, he praises God's mercy; when it goes

badly with him, he magnifies God's justice. When God has a rod in his hand, a godly man will have a psalm in his mouth. The devil's smiting of Job was like striking a musical instrument; he sounded forth praise: *'The Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'* (Job 1:21).

(5) The one being sanctified becomes a *praying* man. He sees his dependence on the Almighty, and so, he makes his requests to God knowing that He is able to give him the things for which he is truly needful. But it is not just a sense of need that sends him praying, it is a desire for communion with God that moves him to talk with God.

(6) The one being sanctified becomes a man who seeks to be with *God's people*. There is an attraction toward them that knits his heart with them. He desires and enjoys the Word of God preached and discussed. He belongs among them and feels at home with them.

(7) The one being sanctified becomes a man who desires *the glory of God*. The unsanctified man only acts holy before others to be seen of others. The sanctified man, however, shrinks from being seen of men. He desires that God might increase, even if it means his own decrease. His Christianity is not one of outward show so as to puff himself up in the eyes of others; he is content to do his good deeds in secret and see the recipient bless God for God's blessing.

4. The sanctification of the Spirit is evidenced in the desires and attitudes of the believer toward Jesus Christ.

The person being sanctified by the Holy Spirit looks to Jesus Christ as his all in all. He sees a sufficiency in the Lord Jesus for every spiritual need that he has--and they are many. He looks to Jesus for pardon and cleansing from sin. He looks to Jesus for comfort in his sorrow, strength in his difficulty, for encouragement in his distress. He looks to Jesus to guide and instruct him. He sees Jesus as His *Prophet*. He looks to Jesus to cleanse him of his guilt and pollution. He sees Jesus as His *Priest*. He subjects himself to Jesus as His Lord and orders his life according to his will. He sees Jesus as his *King*. The person becoming sanctified sees in Jesus all the perfections of grace that he desires for himself, so he desires and seeks conformity to him in thought, attitude, and action.

5. The sanctification of the Spirit is evidenced in the desires and attitudes of the believer toward the things of the Holy Spirit.

Now a word of clarification is important here. When we say that the one being sanctified desires the things of the Spirit, we are not saying that the Spirit Himself is the focus of His attention. We say this because the Holy Spirit does not move men to seek Him, but rather He moves men to seek Christ. And so, it is "the things of the Spirit" that are desired by those who are being sanctified by the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:5; 1 Cor. 2:1). What do these things of the Spirit include?

(1) They desire to walk after the Spirit; that is, to walk in the way of holiness (Rom. 8:4).

(2) They look to the power of the Spirit to enable them to do the things commanded of them. God gave us the desire to please him when we were born again. But he only gives us the power to do those things as the Holy Spirit enables us when the challenge arises and we look to Christ for the power of the Holy Spirit.

(3) They walk daily as they are being directed and taught by the Holy Spirit in the Holy Scriptures.

6. The sanctification of the Spirit is evidenced in the attitudes and opinions of the believer toward sin.

(1) Because He sees the Bible as God's Word, He approves of what it says about sin and its penalty. He agrees with the word as to what defines sin. The unsanctified man cannot be subject to the law of God; it is not possible for him to be so (Rom. 7:12). But the sanctified man cannot be otherwise. He approves of the Lord's declarations in His law. He sees God's law as holy, just, and good.

(2) The one being sanctified hates sin and is grieved deeply by it. The world cannot know how the believer being sanctified by the Spirit feels toward the things that it wants them to approve and celebrate. They see our disapproval of sin as arrogant, bigoted, and ignorant. We are moved by blind fear and hatred, they say. No, we by the Spirit were made subject to the law of God in our innermost being and we cannot have it otherwise, nor would we want to have it so.

(3) The believer being sanctified hates sin most in himself. The unsanctified man does not hate sin in himself; rather, he cherishes it. Oh, he might be ashamed of it, but he loves it still. It has a power over him that leads him everywhere it would take him. Sin may have great influence in the life of the sanctified persons also, but he screams against himself and it as he is caught and drug to sin's lair. He does not go willingly, but rather with regret and resistance.

(4) The one being sanctified is concerned about his tongue, what he says. He knows that a fountain cannot send forth at the same place and time **sweet** water and bitter (James 3:11). When he sins with his tongue he is smitten in his conscience.

(5) The one being sanctified is concerned about his relationship with his brothers and sisters in Christ. His own peace is disturbed when peace between himself and others is disturbed.

(6) The sanctified man will seek to break off from his old sins and the places and people that would lead him into old sins. He strives against sin. It is warfare for him, battles, in which he does not always win. But when he does suffer defeat, he gathers himself up and enters the fray once again, waging the good warfare for Christ.

(7) The sanctified man loathes his weakness and failings. He is not as others who can easily justify themselves. He sometimes is thrown into despair because of the deepness of his remorse.

(8) He longs to be free from the power of sin in his life. If he had his wish, he would never sin again. He looks forward to the day when Christ returns and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit will be perfected in Him.

Do you not see how all of these characteristics cannot arise from anyone but that man or woman, boy or girl, who is being sanctified by the Holy Spirit? **John Gill**, from whom I gleaned much of these descriptions, said it this way:

Now can such actings in the mind, and in life, spring from nature? Must they not arise from a principle of holiness in the heart? Can there be such reverence of God, love to him, resignation to his will, affectionate and fervent devotion to him, desires of communion with him, and a concern in all things for his glory, without a supernatural principle of grace and holiness in the soul? Is it possible, that an unsanctified man should ever apply to Christ for cleansing, be subject to him as King, be desirous of walking as he walked, and of being wrought up to conformity to him? Or be concerned to mind the things of the Spirit, and to walk after the Spirit, and to live in him, and be careful not to grieve him? can there be such actings in the mind concerning sin, as to love the law, which forbids it; to dislike sin, abhor it, and hate it; engage in an opposition to it, abstain from it, lament it, and earnestly desire to be rid of it; can these be the produce of nature? Or be without being internally sanctified by the Spirit of God?

Of course the answer is “No.” The sinner must be the recipient of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit for these graces to be seen in the life.

IV. Sanctification—Why is sanctification a critically important matter? Answer: There is no salvation apart from sanctification.

Thomas Brooks described the matter well:

Heaven is only for the holy man, and the holy man is only for heaven: heaven is a garment of glory, that is only suited to him that is holy. God, who is truth itself, and cannot lie, has said it, that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Mark that word, “no man” (Heb. 12:14). Without holiness the rich man shall not see the Lord; without holiness the poor man shall not see the Lord; without holiness the nobleman shall not see the Lord; without holiness the common man shall not see the Lord; without holiness the prince shall not see the Lord; without holiness the peasant shall not see the Lord; without holiness the ruler shall not see the Lord; without holiness the ruled shall not see the Lord; without holiness the learned man shall not see the Lord; without holiness the ignorant man shall not see the Lord; without holiness the husband shall not see the Lord; without holiness the wife shall not see the Lord; without holiness the father shall not see the Lord; without holiness the child shall not see the Lord; without holiness the master shall not see the Lord; without holiness the servant shall not see the Lord. “For faithful and strong is the Lord of hosts that hath spoken it” (Josh. 23:14).

I hope that we are informed enough about spiritual things to know that *our sanctification is not the basis of our salvation*; that is, it is not the cause of it.⁶ Rather, our sanctification is evidence of the possession of salvation, that we are justified before God. Sanctification is an aspect of salvation itself. God does not accept you into heaven because you have earned a place because you are a better person than you once were. God will only accept you into heaven because of Christ and his life, not because of yours. Sanctification is essential to salvation, but it is not the grounds of salvation. Justification is the grounds; or rather, Christ is the ground of our justification; our sanctification is not. However, our sanctification is proof that we are justified in his sight. That is what the apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:7, “Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.” In the first statement, “he that doeth righteousness” speaks of the one who is being sanctified by God. In the second statement, “is righteous”, describes the one who is justified before God. One way you can determine that someone is a true Christian is if he is in the process of being sanctified in his life. This would indicate that he is a righteous, or justified, man through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

We are not made acceptable to God because he makes us into people like Christ. Rather, he accepts us as sinners when we believe on Christ and then He proceeds to make us like Christ. Do not confuse the two, justification and sanctification.

⁶ This is one of the central errors of Roman Catholic doctrine on salvation. Rome teaches that a person is not justified before God, that is, in a right (salvific) relationship with God until he/she is first fully sanctified. The Bible (and Reformed theology) teaches that justification is a onetime declaration of God upon the sinner when he first believes the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that the believer’s sanctification follows afterward. But Rome teaches that one must first be sanctified, and only after the Christian is fully sanctified, is he then justified before God. And so, Rome teaches that in order to become sanctified with view to becoming justified in the distant future, you need God’s grace to transform you. Rome teaches that the Church, (their Church) is the dispenser of this needful grace which brings about one’s sanctification. And so, through the grace that Rome conveys through its sacraments, the sinner is gradually transformed until he reaches that point of holy perfection. Of course Rome would view very few to attain to this level of holiness in this life, so a necessary and prolonged period of time in purgatory is necessary to further cleanse the sinner of his sin. Only afterward, upon the one being fully purged of all sin, does Rome declare the person justified, fit to stand in the presence of God as a fully redeemed individual. This is great error. The Bible teaches that God justifies the ungodly immediately and completely upon true faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord said of the humble, trusting, repentant sinner in the temple, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified” (Luke 18:14).

A good description of sanctification may be seen in **The Baptist Confession of 1689**, chapter 13. There are three paragraphs under this heading of sanctification.

1. They who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also farther sanctified, really and personally,⁷ through the same virtue, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them;⁸ the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed,⁹ and the several lusts of it are more and more weakened and mortified,¹⁰ and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces,¹¹ to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.¹²
2. This sanctification is throughout the whole man,¹³ yet imperfect in this life; there abides still some remnants of corruption in every part,¹⁴ wherefrom arises a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.¹⁵
3. In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail,¹⁶ yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome;¹⁷ and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, pressing after an heavenly life, in evangelical obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in his Word has prescribed to them.¹⁸

Next week, Lord willing, we will address one aspect of our sanctification, that being deliverance from sexual immorality. This is what Paul addressed directly in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: *that you abstain from sexual immorality...*”

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess. 5:23)

⁷ Acts 20:32; Rom. 6:5, 6

⁸ John 17:17; Eph. 3:16-19; 1 Thess. 5:21-23

⁹ Rom. 6:14

¹⁰ Gal. 5:24

¹¹ Col. 1:11

¹² Rom. 6:14

¹³ 1 Thess. 5:23

¹⁴ Rom. 7:18, 23

¹⁵ Gal. 5:17; 1 Pet. 2:11

¹⁶ Rom. 7:23

¹⁷ Rom. 6:14

¹⁸ Eph. 4:15,16; 2 Cor. 3:18, 7:1