

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life (14);
Following Jesus Christ Rightly #8: The Sanctification of the Believer**

Introduction:

Today we continue this series that we began some months ago, “The ABC’s of the Christian Life.” We divided our subject into three divisions. After we *first* gave two Sundays to consider the critical importance of coming initially to Jesus Christ for salvation, we then, *secondly*, addressed the responsibility to follow Christ unto our full and final salvation. But then we began the *third* division of our subject, in which we have been addressing how we might follow Jesus Christ rightly. What we intend by this is for us to consider the most important lessons that Christians should know and do in order to receive God’s greatest blessing that He bestows upon those who walk with Him in faith and obedience.

The 8th subject in this third division of our study of “The ABC’s” is *the sanctification of the believer*. Now we have stated several times that the topics in this third division of subjects are not essential to salvation. They are important, but not absolutely essential to understand rightly or fully in order to have salvation. But our subject today should not be regarded as non-essential, for the sanctification of the true believer in Jesus Christ is essential to salvation. We are not saying that you need to *understand* this matter of sanctification rightly in order to have salvation, for many would be in trouble if that were the case. But we are saying that the *experience* of being sanctified is essential to salvation. The Holy Scriptures declare, “*Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord*” (Heb. 12:14). Pursuing holiness is this grace of sanctification in the life of the Christian. And so, certainly our sanctification is not the basis of our salvation; that is, it is not the cause of it. Rather, our sanctification is evidence of the possession of salvation. Moreover it is the course or path that those who have salvation take through life unto their promised everlasting inheritance. Sanctification is part of salvation itself. God does not accept us into heaven because we have earned a place, because we have become a better person than we once were. God only accepts us into heaven because of Christ and his life, not because of us and our life. 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.

Sanctification is essential to salvation, but it is not the ground of salvation. Justification is the ground; or rather, Christ is the ground; 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 one deceive you. He who *practices righteousness is righteous*, just as He is righteous.” Here “practices righteousness” speaks of sanctification, but “righteous” speaks of justification. John was declaring that the evidence of one’s justification is that he is being sanctified in his life. Do not confuse the two, justification and sanctification. They must be kept distinct from one another in meaning. But at the same time they cannot be severed from one another. They go hand in hand in the experience of every true Christian.

In addressing this matter of our sanctification it is not our intention at this time to treat the subject in an exhaustive manner. We have done so in the past. Way back in July of 2000, we spoke on two Sundays of sanctifying grace in our series on grace. And then a few years later in the winter of 2003 and 2004, we addressed the subject of sanctification in an extended study of 25 sermons, which included a detailed study of Romans 6, 7, and 8, in which is the Apostle Paul addressing this subject in detail. We also addressed those chapters in our series on Romans in the spring of 2013. Those studies are available through the office or by request to me. But it was not long ago, just last November and December, when we spoke of sanctification on three Sundays, when were in our study of 1 Thessalonians 4. And so, having covered this subject thoroughly, we desire to address it today more generally. Our intention today is to introduce our subject, expressing the most salient points.

Moreover, it is not our intention in this series to impart new information to those of us who are Christians. I hope that what we say but reinforces what you already understand and believe. Perhaps enhanced understanding results from what we consider. I hope that it would be so. But we are setting forth foundational matters, matters in which we should already be grounded. I am playing the part of Peter in this respect, who wrote,

¹²For this reason I will not be negligent *to remind* you always of these things, *though you know and are established in the present truth.* ¹³Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, *to stir you up by reminding you,* ¹⁴knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. ¹⁵Moreover I will be careful to ensure that *you always have a reminder of these things* after my decease. (2 Pet. 1:12-15)

In these matters repetition is good, for reinforcement is necessary.

Let us begin our subject by affirming that...

I. Sanctification is the experience of all true Christians.

Let us turn to Acts 20, in which we read of the Apostle Paul addressing the elders of the church at Ephesus. We begin reading with verse 25.

And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. ²⁶Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

³²***“So 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.*** ³³I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. ³⁵I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

³⁶And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, ³⁸sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

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 put into port. He sought to encourage and to warn these elders of their responsibilities and of the dangers that were before them. Even among themselves, some 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 seek 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 Caesarea in Palestine. In Paul's defence he described 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." Here we have an additional word directly 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*.

Given the importance of this subject we should understand...

II. The critical importance of distinguishing justification from sanctification

It is extremely important to understand how these two aspects of our salvation, our justification before God and our sanctification by God, are similar with each other, but that they are also quite different from each other. Let us take a few minutes to describe these similarities and their differences.

A. In what ways are our justification and sanctification alike?

1. They are like one another in that they are both the result of the working of God. They have the same author. It is God who justifies, and it is God who sanctifies. With regard to the first, we read in **Romans 8:33** that God is its author: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? *It is God that justifies*" (Rom. 8:33). We read in several places that God is also the author of the work of sanctification that He carries on within the soul. God said to Moses, "*I am the Lord that does sanctify you*" (Exo. 31:13; Lev. 20:8).

2. They are like one another in that they originate of the free and sovereign work of God's grace. Justification is an act of free grace, and so is sanctification. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit. 3:5). They are both of grace--freely and sovereignly bestowed by God.

3. They are alike in that they always are seen together in every person who is the object of God's grace. There has never been a person who was justified, but that he was also sanctified. There never has been the case that a man experienced God's inward work of sanctification, but that he was also justified before God. Paul described the Christians at Corinth, "Such were some of you (i.e. flagrant sinners), but you are washed, but you are *sanctified*, but you are *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

4. They are like one another in that both of them are the fruit of the Word of God. God justifies sinners through their belief in the truth. Jesus said to His own, "Now you are clean through the Word that I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). God also sanctifies His people by the Word of truth. He prayed to His Father, "Sanctify them by Your truth; Your Word is truth" (John 17:17). And also we read in Ephesians 5:6 of Christ's work in His church, "That He might sanctify and cleanse His Church, with the washing of water by the Word."

5. They are like one another in that both are necessary to eternal life. God has declared that no man will escape God's condemnation on Judgment Day unless He is justified. He has also declared that no one will pass the scrutiny of God's judgment unless he is sanctified. They are of equal necessity to the possession of eternal life.

B. In what ways are our justification and sanctification differ from one another?

We have seen that in some ways they are much alike, but in other ways they are quite distinct from one another.

1. Justification is an act of God about the *standing* of a man before God; but sanctification is the work of God concerning the *nature* of a man. It has been said in this way: Justification is an act of God as a Judge about a delinquent, absolving him from a sentence of death; but sanctification is an act of God about us, as a physician, in curing us of a mortal disease.

Imagine this scenario. You have a criminal that comes before a judge to be tried. He is charged with high treason. He is found to be guilty. He is worthy of death. But this same guilty man is also a diseased man. He has a disease of which he will not recover, but he will most certainly die. Not only does he need to escape from the condemnation of his guilt, but he needs healing of his deadly disease. Justification is God's answer to his guilt; sanctification is God's answer to his sinful condition from which he must be delivered. God acts toward the sinner in absolving him of his guilt; God works in that same man to cure him of his sinfulness. Both are necessary. Justification, therefore, is an act of God as a gracious Judge, but sanctification is a work of God as a merciful Physician. It has been pointed out that David joins them both together in Psalm 103:3, "(God) Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases."

2. Justification and sanctification differ from one another in that justification is an act of God's grace on account of the righteousness of another, even Jesus, but sanctification is a work of God in which he infuses righteousness into us. The first, justification, speaks of imputation: God imputes or reckons the righteousness of Jesus Christ to be that of the believing sinner. This is God's work *for* us. The second, sanctification, speaks of infusion, in which God works *in* us to make us holy.

3. Justification and sanctification differ from one another in that *our justification is complete, or perfect, but our sanctification is incomplete.* Justification occurred when the sinner first truly believed on Jesus Christ as his Savior. Justification is complete, knowing of no degrees. It is the same in every believer, new and old alike. The newest believer among us is as justified before God as the one among us who has believed longest. There is not degree of our justification. You are either justified or you are not. Our justification cannot be diminished or increased. It cannot be interrupted or it cannot cease to be. But sanctification is an imperfect, incomplete, changeable thing in every believer. One believer is more sanctified than another. It knows of many degrees between persons and even in the same person. A true believer may not become more justified than he is presently, but he can become much more sanctified than he is currently. A saint who has died and gone to be with the Lord is no more justified there than he was when he was a believer here on earth. But then he will be completely sanctified, far above the condition in which he now finds himself.

4. Justification and sanctification differ from one another in that *our justification involves no work of our own*, but is based solely upon the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, *but our sanctification involves very much our work.* As God has commanded through Paul,

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation* with fear and trembling.

And yet, we know and confess that this work we do is in no way meritorious and in no way contributes to our justification. Justification involves our believing, trusting, resting in Jesus Christ *alone* for our righteousness. Our sanctification also involves our believing, trusting, resting in Jesus Christ, but it is as we go forth *with all of our effort*. We rest in Jesus Christ for our justification, but we work with all our might toward our full sanctification. The Scriptures liken our sanctification to striving, fighting, running, sowing, seeking, journeying, enduring, overcoming, and even exerting violence in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. There is no salvation for the believer unless you trust Jesus Christ alone for

your justification. But there is no salvation for you if you refuse or fail to “*work out your own salvation* with fear and trembling.”

Now, herein lays the great difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. I believe this is one of the major errors of Roman Catholicism that renders the “gospel” they preach as “another gospel” (cf. Gal. 1). It teaches that a sinner becomes justified before God after and because God has *infused* righteousness in him. The Bible (and historic Protestantism) states that the sinner becomes justified before God through faith alone, apart from works, because God *reckons* or credits Christ’s righteousness to the believer. According to Rome, the “Christian” is not justified until he himself is *made* righteous; the Bible teaches that the believing sinner is *regarded* as righteous because of Christ. Rome teaches that justification is the result of a long process which God works in a believer through this life and thereafter through purgatory, until he is finally and fully holy, only *then* he becomes justified in God’s sight. This is terrible error that renders that one who believes this to still be condemned in his sins. Paul wrote, “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Gal. 2:21).

But where Rome’s great error is to see sanctification as the basis of justification, *the great error of evangelicalism is that as long as you have justification* (and they say that comes through a one-time “decision”), *you can have salvation irrespective of sanctification*. Oh, yes, sanctification is taught by them as a good thing, a desirable thing, and there are many consequences for failing to live so as to be sanctified, but it is generally taught that it has nothing to do with salvation. As a result there are many who believe themselves to be justified before God, but they are deluding themselves, for they are not striving to live in a holy manner before God. Whereas Rome has confused and reversed the order of justification and sanctification, many evangelicals have severed the two, claiming that you can have justification before God without being sanctified by God.

II. More precisely, what is sanctification?

A. Sanctification carries the idea of being consecrated or set apart 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 having been chosen and set 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 between them and us whom He has not sanctified. We might describe this as *positional* sanctification. We are sanctified in this sense in that we have been singled out and set apart because God has designs for us that are different from all others.

This positional sanctification was a work of grace on our behalf. *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 has perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” This was a work of grace that was accomplished on our behalf apart from us, apart from our work or effort. This was a work of grace that Christ performed on behalf of each of His own.

B. Sanctification carries the idea of being purified or made holy in our lives.

The sanctification that we are speaking of this morning is not of this positional nature, but rather we are addressing *practical* sanctification. This sanctification is the work of God in the life of the Christian whereby God makes the sinner into a holy person in thought, attitude and behaviour. We may see this type of sanctification described or expressed throughout the Scriptures. For example, we read in **1 Thessalonians 4:3f** “For this is the will of God, even your *sanctification*, that ye should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in *sanctification* and honour.”

Do you see how this is not a positional matter, but a practical one? It is not a work of sanctification that is done on our behalf as much as *it is a work of grace performed in each of us so as to purify us, making us holy.*

The sanctification of the Holy Spirit begins with the sinner's regeneration. This work of sanctification by the Holy Spirit is when He causes a sinner to become born again. The sanctification of the Spirit is not a mere outward reformation of behaviour, an 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 due to knowledge of God's law. 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. 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.

The sanctification of the Spirit is evidenced in the desires and attitudes of the believer toward God and His Son, 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.

The sanctification of the Spirit is evidenced in the attitudes and opinions of the believer toward sin. 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 (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 (Rom. 7:12).

The believer who is 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. "Christians 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 other than what God has taught us to know and desire. We desire that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

But 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 also have great influence in the life of one being sanctified, but he screams against himself and that sin as he is caught and drug to sin's lair. He does not go willingly, but rather with regret and resistance.

The Westminster Catechism sets forth in concise language the nature of sanctification:

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).** (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.

And so, sanctification speaks of God making a person holy. The Holy Spirit imparts grace to the believer giving him both the desire and ability to do the will of God and become more and more Christ-like in life. It is a *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 the 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 sin that indwells us.

Let us consider...

III. Several basic principles of our sanctification

There are biblical truths and principles that we should know and affirm respecting our sanctification. If we know and believe these principles, then we will be able to experience more fully the work of grace in sanctification in our lives. We will not spend time expanding on these, other than to state what should be obvious:

Principle 1: Our sanctification involves personal responsibility to be obedient to standards of God's righteousness.

We will not be sanctified unless we see our duty, and we purpose to perform it. Our sanctification requires our intentional effort to obey God and to become conformed to His moral law, His standards of righteousness. His commandments are not mere recommendations to us. These are commands. They are to be obeyed. We will not become sanctified unless we resolve to conform our thinking and behavior to the Holy Scriptures.

But clearly practical sanctification is a work of God's grace. Paul expressed this in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and 24.

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. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

We see that this work of sanctification, even though it involves our responsible obedience, nevertheless, is a work of God's grace in us. This means that although we have the responsibility to obey, we are in need of God's power to do so. We are not able, even though we are Christians, to live a life before God apart from His enabling grace. In all of our resolve and all of our active obedience, there must be the power of God working within us. He must give us grace or we will not become sanctified Christians. We may say, therefore,

Principle 2: Our sanctification involves our responsible obedience as we are enabled by the grace of God.

The grace of God is what gives us the desire and the ability to obey Him. Some believe that this grace of God in sanctification means that we are not to be striving to live according to God's laws, rather, we are to be passive, resting in God's grace to do in us that which we cannot ourselves do. But the Bible does not teach this. Our need for the grace of God for our sanctification does not mean we should be passive, simply or only trusting, but rather it should move us to be all the more diligent in our efforts. This grace working in our hearts and minds should motivate us to put forth all of our effort to walk with Him. As Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:12 and 13**

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Principle 3: Sanctification is a progressive work that continues throughout the believer's life.

You will never arrive at a completed stage of holiness in this life. You are to strive to be perfect, and as you obey God's Word by God's grace you will move closer toward becoming like Christ. But you will never arrive at a stage of perfection in this life.

Let us now turn to another passage of the New Testament to see what another apostle wrote about sanctification. Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter 1. Here Peter described God's equipping His people for living righteously in this life. Let us read **2 Peter 1:1-4**.

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through

these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

From this passage we may state...

Principle 4: God has already given us “all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us.”

If you are a Christian, then you already have all that is needed to live a godly life. You are not in need of something new, like a *secret method* or *technique* that has only been disclosed to some Christians and that is why they and not you are living in a godly manner. Nor are you in need of an *additional experience* of from God, His Son, or the Holy Spirit, in order for you to live a life of godliness. God in bringing you knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ has given you all that you need in order for you to become sanctified before Him.

Please do not misunderstand. Yes, you are in need of more grace day by day if you are going to live godly. The grace that you have needs to be “multiplied”, as Peter wrote in verse 2. But the point that we are trying to make is that even now as a believer in Jesus Christ, you currently have access to that grace. You do not need to experience some new blessing or receive some new gift to receive needed grace. You do not need to go to another person, some church leader, or some church ritual to receive this grace through them. God has promised His grace to be available to you directly, simply because you are a Christian; God’s grace for living is available to all “*who have obtained like precious faith.*”

But then Peter, as did Paul, after mentioning God’s grace in sanctifying His people, set forth that the believer has the responsibility to take action respecting his sanctification, or his growth in holiness (1:5-7).

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

Now, after having considered several basic principles regarding our sanctification, let us learn of several different views about the...

IV. The means of grace for living

We have already seen that we must be very active and diligent in obeying God’s Word if we are to become holy in our minds, hearts, and life. We have seen, however, that we are in need of God’s grace. But how does God give us this grace? What are the means of grace? That is, what would God have us do in order to receive the desire and ability to live in obedience to His Word?

It is here, when we begin to speak of the means that God gives grace to His people, that major differences emerge among conservative evangelical Christians. I want to present briefly four differing views of how people believe that God sanctifies His people by grace. I suspect that many of us have been exposed to these four positions, which only contributes to our misunderstanding and failure for living for Christ. I myself have held to several of these views in the past, but I see the fourth view to be most consistent with Scripture and I hope to present a Scriptural case for its defence.

But several important questions arise for us: ***How does this work of sanctification take place? What steps are a believer to take in order to advance his sanctification?*** Or, are there “steps” that he can take? Opinions differ widely among Christians. I have a book that sets forth five different views of the nature of sanctification and the ways that God sanctifies His people. These different views are characteristic of different denominations or traditions within Protestantism. I suspect that several of these have influenced some of us from one degree to another. And so, I hope to clarify in our own minds in *general terms* the means that God has revealed in His Word whereby we may grow in our sanctification. In our effort to do so, we will need to try and correct some commonly held but unbiblical views of sanctification. And so, first let us consider...

A. The Wesleyan view of sanctification, which has been commonly called “perfectionism.”

By the title, one can see immediately that it was a position that was popularized largely by John Wesley, in the 1700's, but it found expression also in the ministry and teaching of **Charles Finney** in the 1800's and it is still a popular position today. Wesleyan preaching often focused on not only people becoming *believers*, but also becoming *consecrated* to God, as a second blessing, a second significant experience that every believer should seek and receive. This position argues that unless you have received the second work of grace in your life, you cannot live a life of holiness before God. This Wesleyan view of sanctification is believed and taught by the more evangelical-minded Methodists, the Christian Missionary Alliance denomination, and the Church of the Nazarene.

What does this position say about God's grace for living?

1. The Christian, after conversion, may/will live a period of life characterized by defeat and failure until a "second blessing" is experienced. It is a second transforming work of grace is an instantaneous experience whereby a Christian suddenly advances to a new, higher spiritual plane.

2. His life from then onward is characterized by a full heart of love for God and love for others.

3. This gift of holiness is to be sought by prayer and full dedication and surrender and there really is no way to live a godly life until one has received this blessing from God. For Wesley taught that it was "a final cleansing of the heart through the actual uprooting and destroying of 'inbred sin' and the channelling of all a man's personal energies--intellectual, volitional, emotional, motivational--into the one sustained activity of loving God and others."¹ This view of sanctification, I would argue, is not supported by Holy Scripture.

B. The Pentecostal view of sanctification

The Pentecostal view of grace emerged from Wesley's teaching. This began in the middle of the last century and continues to be a widely held view today. The emphasis of the "second blessing" is attributed to the baptism of the Holy Spirit that is separate and subsequent to salvation. This baptism is evidenced by speaking in tongues. Similar to the Wesleyan view, it is said that a person may be a true Christian but a defeated one, not encountering victory over sin or truly experiencing the fruit or the gifts of the Spirit until this experience is encountered. But upon being baptized in the Spirit the person encounters a transformation and is thereafter enabled to live a Spirit-empowered life.

It should be recognized that among Pentecostals there are differences. Some are altogether Wesleyan in their assertion that a second blessing is prerequisite to living a holy life. Other Pentecostals, however, see this as a diminishing of the sufficiency of what Christ did on the cross. Although they would argue that every Christian should seek to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, they would tend to put more emphasis on "the finished work of Calvary." They would be in agreement with what we are asserting, sanctification is a process, which involves our effort and the Holy Spirit's power.

C. The Keswick view of sanctification

I suspect that only a few of us are familiar with this term and even fewer still could identify its characteristics. But actually, it is a view about sanctification--receiving God's grace for living--which is probably held by most evangelicals, or "Bible believers." I held this view for years. The teaching has been around since about 1875. It began and was popularized in Bible conferences that were held annually at Keswick, England, from which it derived its name. The teaching is also sometimes referred to as "Victorious-life teaching." or "The Deeper Life" or "The Higher Christian Life." It is held by many but is popularized by some more than others: It is the view that is put forward by **Campus Crusade's** little tract, "*How to Live the Spirit-Filled Life.*"

¹ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 138.

Its principle argument is as follows: based on Romans 6:1-14 it is argued that a “person can be a true Christian but with an unsundered life, but through a crisis of surrender the victorious life might begin for such a defeated Christian.”² This theory of sanctification involves three essential points:

1. A Christian can truly be justified but still under sin’s dominion. What is needed is a second work of grace in which self is taken off the throne of one’s heart and Christ is enthroned.

2. Through certain steps, a Christian may enter into this place of victorious Christian living.

(a) The believer must consciously reckon himself to be dead unto sin (Rom. 6). You have to **believe** this before you can **experience** it.

(b) The believer must consciously rely on Christ rather than himself to defeat temptation and sin and prompt righteousness.

(c) He must “believe” in Christ’s resurrection power in order to spiritually receive this power.

3. A Christian must cease to exert all personal effort, and trust Christ alone to do work in him. Any effort to keep God’s commands or any inclination of duty or responsibility to do so is to be avoided, for that is self-effort, and doomed to failure. Thus, **the Christian is to be passive**. If the Christian tries to resist directly the urges to sin, he will fail. Things like commands and practical instruction are counter-productive for we do not have the ability to do the things God commands us; the life we lead must be by faith: Him living His life through us.” “Let go and let God.” “Rest” in Him. “Let Him take over.”

This view of sanctification was presented as “a new discovery” from the Bible which would transform Christendom. The claim was that Christians through this teaching would become more holy, more sanctified than at any time in Christian history. J. C. Ryle refuted and corrected this view of sanctification in his classic book that he wrote in the latter 19th century, called **Holiness**.³

D. The reformed view of sanctification

1. The differences from the above views:

(a) **There are no shortcuts to holiness; there are no “secrets” whereby you may be set free.** Although there are victories, they are generally won after warfare has been waged for a time. Sudden deliverances may occur, particularly when one first encounters salvation in Christ, but they tend not to be the normal experience of all Christians.

(b) **There is not a single “second blessing” which you must receive in order to become holy. He has already given you everything needful for a godly life.**

“And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Col. 2:10).

“And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). Or as the NIV renders it, “From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another.”

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that [pertain] unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2 Pet. 1:3, 4).

² Henry Boardman, *The Higher Life Doctrine of Sanctification Tried by the Word of God* (Sprinkle Publications, 1996), p. ii.

³ J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Associated Publishers and Authors, n.d.).

(c) It involves direct, energetic, full-hearted action and obedience of the believer to the Word of God.

There is no passivity, but moving forward in reliance on Him to strengthen you as you go. Paul wrote,

“But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).

“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:3).

“Abstain from all appearance of evil. And (may) the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.” (1 Thes. 5:22-24)

(d) It maintains a connection between justification and sanctification, while recognizing the distinctiveness of the two.

There is no scriptural case that one can be a Christian, truly pardoned--justified, without also having experienced a work of sanctification. The above positions sever the two, pardon and purity, so that one may be forgiven while still self-willed and living in rebellion. In Scripture there are two classes of people, Christian and non-Christian. The above positions have developed three classes: (1) unsaved people, (2) sanctified/spiritual Christians, and (3) “carnal” Christians. But the Scriptures make it clear that a justified person is a converted person, wholly and essentially different than he/she was before, with new beliefs, new aspirations, new attitudes, and new actions.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Cor. 5:17)

“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).

(e) It maintains that the principle means of sanctification is grace that is given by Christ, through the Holy Spirit, applying the Scriptures to the mind (heart) and life.

It is not through a “mystical” encounter with the Spirit apart from the Word, but a working of the Spirit through the Word of God that brings about the believer’s sanctification.

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that [pertain] unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (1 Peter 1:2,3)

“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:” (Col 1:9-12)

2. The reformed view of sanctification also emphasizes that God has given His people the means by which He imparts grace to them enabling them to become more sanctified.

God has given us *private* means of grace. These include private prayer, personal Scripture reading, personal meditation upon Scriptural truths, and private, personal self-examination.

God has also given is *public* means of grace. These include the gathering of Christians together on the Lord's Day for corporate worship, which includes singing, prayer, the public reading of the Word, the hearing of the Word of God preached to His people. The Lord has also provided the partaking of the Lord's Supper within the local church as a means of grace in that faith is stirred up, strengthened, and put in remembrance of Christ crucified and Christ returning one day. The meeting together for fellowship and prayer, and accountability is also a means of grace that the Lord has given His people. And we must not leave out formal church discipline as a means of grace in sanctification, if that necessity arise in the life of the church.

3. The reformed view of sanctification gives emphasis the need for watchfulness over our day-to-day conduct, ordering life according to God's Word

4. The reformed view of sanctification advocates the need of carefulness with regard to our associations and those with whom we develop close friendships.

5. The reformed view of sanctification emphasizes the need for regular and habitual communion with our Triune God

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5)

6. The reformed view of sanctification advocates the active pursuit to come to truth in order to correct error and order one's life (Romans 12:1, 2).

We see ourselves as having a problem of spiritual darkness that needs to have the light of God's Word to provide us understanding and direction. Through the Scriptures He corrects our error, dispels our confusion, and removes our ignorance.

7. The reformed view of sanctification emphasizes the need for continual prayer to God, and reliance on Jesus Christ to bestow needed grace for every situation and action. In all our doing there is no self-confidence or self-reliance. It is all of grace.

Conclusion:

Grace for living. If you are a Christian, God has given to you everything you need to live before Him in a manner that pleases Him and will bring delight to you. The means are available to us. We are to employ them. But certainly we are in need of fresh, repeated bestowing of the Holy Spirit upon us in order that we might live for Him (Luke 11:11). May God our Father be pleased to give us grace that we might live before Him.

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)
