

CHAPTER 13

OF SANCTIFICATION

Definition of sanctification

“1. They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened, in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

“Sanctification” comes from the word “sanctify,” or “make holy.” Originally it had the idea of “separation.” God has separated us from the masses of mankind to receive his salvation. In time the Holy Spirit sanctified our hearts to enable us to receive the gospel (1 Cor 6:11; 1 Pet 1:2).

But normally the word is used to describe our growth in grace after we are justified and adopted. Therefore, our sanctification is not a sudden event, but a gradual process, taking place all during our Christian life.

This sanctification has two faces:

- That which is evil in us gradually is mortified, put to death (Rom 6:5-6, 14; 8:13; Gal 5:24).
- On the other hand, that which is good in us is gradually strengthened (Eph 3:16-19; 4:14-15; Col 1:11; 2 Cor 7:1).

The way we increase our holiness or sanctification is to refrain from sins and make use of the means of grace: the Word of God (John 17:17; Eph 5:26), prayer (Luke 22:40; Eph 1:16-23; 3:14-16), the sacraments (1 Cor 11:28), God’s providence (Heb 12:10). The one who uses all these means to sanctify us is the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:1-17, esp. v. 11, cf. v. 13).

If this sanctification is not going on in us, we are not one of God’s children (Rom 8:9; Heb 12:14). We should have a “godly fear” of not being holy (2 Cor 7:1).

The extent of sanctification

“2. This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life: there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.”

God’s sanctification touches every part of our hearts—our hearts, souls, minds, affections, desires (1 Thess 5:23). All these terms refer to our spiritual selves, and overlap in meaning. Yet we still never attain perfection in this life—we still sin (Phil 3:12; 1 John 1:8-10).

We must contribute to our own sanctification by continual effort, fighting against sin in our own lives (Rom 7:14-25). In this fight we use our faith and the spiritual weapons God has put at our disposal (Gal 3:2-3; 5:16-25; Eph 6:10-18).

Setbacks in our sanctification

“3. In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome: and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

The Scriptures record how God’s great saints often fell into grievous sins, as Noah, Abraham, David, and Peter. Paul in Rom 7 describes how sin was still a powerful force in his life. But the true Christian will overcome in the end and will gradually become more holy, confessing his sins to God and being cleansed from them and strengthened to resist them. As we more and more know Jesus, we become more like him (2 Cor 3:18).