

Salvation Belongs to the Lord (Sanctification Part 2 – The Agent and Means of Sanctification)

Today, we come to our second sermon under the larger topic of Salvation on sanctification. We defined sanctification. This includes two aspects: 1) Objective sanctification and 2) Progressive sanctification. Then, we considered the fact that God's will for our lives IS our sanctification. Today, I want to consider the Agent (power) and the Means of Sanctification. So, let's begin.

1. The Agent of Sanctification. The Bible is clear when it comes to our sanctification. God is the one who sanctifies us. We do not sanctify ourselves. In 1 Thess. 5:23-24 Paul says, **“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. HE who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”** Brothers and sisters, from the beginning, this is the teaching of the Bible. In the great plan of God to save a people from sin and its consequences, God will set his people apart from the world as a holy people. There has always been a separation of the godly and the ungodly. Noah was set apart in a very evil world as he found favor with God. God appeared to Abraham and called him with very great promises and set him apart. We see the same in the lives of Isaac and Jacob, and then Jacob's sons, the twelve tribes of Israel. In the Exodus God set Israel apart from Egypt and the nations around them. And throughout the Law of Moses, they are commanded to be different, to be holy. We see this same principle in the NT as Peter says, **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”** (1 Pet. 2:9) Can there be anything more glorious, more beautiful, more magnificent, etc. than this truth? If you are a Christian, you have been set apart as holy. You have been justified by the blood of Christ. Positionally, you are seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). How great is this? You are set apart. You are sanctified.

Now, you might say, this is great! In Christ I belong to God. But, we still live in a very evil world, where most of the people oppose Christ as king. And, if we look at our own lives, we see that sin still remains. This is an easy comment to make. How many of you can say you have not sinned this week? When we read our covenant last week, did you check off all the categories of godly living? Husband, did you always love your wife as Christ loves the church? Wives, did you always give respect to your husbands. Did you love one another from the heart every minute of every day. Children, did you obey your parents always this week? And even if you did obey, did you obey from the heart. Did any of you lose your temper with anyone from work? Did you always do good to your neighbor this week? In your twitter feeds and your social media posts, did you ever slander someone by assuming their motive? On and on I could go. These are questions of practical godliness, practical sanctification. Yes, in Christ, we are SANCTIFIED, set apart, justified in God's sight. But, every day, every week, every year, we are commanded to live godly, to grow in godliness, ALL OF US who are set apart as God's people (pastors, deacons, all members of the Church of Christ).

This brings us to my first truth? God is the ONE who will make sure that we become more and more godly in the process of sanctification. And how does He does this? You know the answer. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit. When we read verses like Phil. 2:13: **“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”** or Eph. 2:10: **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works”** or Rom. 8:28 **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”** we know God will complete what He has begun. And He will do this through his own power, the work of the Holy Spirit. HE is the agent of sanctification.

In the OT, when God called particular prophets, in great humility they often questioned their ability to preach faithfully. But, God always reminds them that He will give them strength to do so. When God called Jeremiah, he says: **“Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.”** But the LORD said to me, **“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.”** I think of King David as he reflected on his life, his great failures and sins. And he remembers God’s covenant with him. In 2 Sam. 7:20 he says, **“For you know your servant, O Lord God! Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your make your servant know it. Therefore, you are great, O Lord God, For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears.”** In other words, God, *“you know my sins, you know my failures, you know who I am. Yet, you have been faithful to keep me and bring me here.”* As Christians, this is our experience, an attitude of repentance. There are many other OT examples I could give. But, who makes sure we continue in spite of our sins? It is God. And if we explore the OT, we will see that God keeps his prophets, kings, priests, and others through the power of the Holy Spirit. As David cries out in Ps. 51:11: **“Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.”**

Now, when we come to the NT, we find the same truth. But, we see this truth as fulfilled in the New Covenant through the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the NT we see the fullness of the Holy Spirit coming upon the people of God. Speaking of Jesus, John the Baptist says, **“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”** (Matt. 3:11). Bothers and sisters, we are reminded of this truth when we take the Lord’s Supper. Jesus says, **“This cup is the new covenant in my blood . . .”** Let me ask, *“what is special about the new covenant?”* Well, many things! But, I want to emphasize the most practical point concerning our sanctification . . . the power of the Holy Spirit! He is the agent of our sanctification.

Do you remember Jeremiah’s words from cp. 31 as he prophesies this new covenant. (If not you should. As Baptists this truth is foundational to why we baptize believers.) Let me read 31:33-34: **“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor**

and each his brother, saying, ‘**Know the LORD,**’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Here we see that what God did with specific prophets, priests, kings, other individuals, through his Spirit, He NOW does with ALL of his people. In the New Covenant, ushered in by the blood of Christ, God gives the Holy Spirit in fulness to ALL his people, to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. This means by the Spirit, you are sanctified (set apart as holy). And by the Spirit, you are being sanctified.

Let me mention two implications. First, if you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. You don’t have “part” of Him. You don’t have “one third” of Him. You don’t have Him coming upon you one day and leaving you the next. IF you are in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit . . . period. (If some of our Pentecostal brothers and sisters would get this truth, the Scriptures, particularly the OT prophecies would make a lot more sense.) Second, since you are given the Holy Spirit in fulness, you are being sanctified. This means God is working in you to make you more and more godly. You have, not just a little help, you have ALL the help. When God commands you to do something He will give you the strength to carry it out. This is why Peter can say, “**His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence . . .**” (2 Pet. 1:3). This means you have a power the world does not have. This also means you have an understanding, a knowledge the world does not possess. We will apply these things more at the end. But, let’s move on to the next truth.

2. The Means of Sanctification. God always uses means to accomplish his ends. So what are these means? I want to address this truth under two headings: 1) General Means and 2) Specific Means.

1) General Means: Our Working. To speak of this subject generally, I want to highlight that we are not robots in this process of sanctification. We “work” to become more godly. In all the commands of Scripture that tell us to be holy, and in all the specific ways we are told to live, this assumes that we will do our best to work in this process. This is our experience! In Phil. 2:12 Paul says, “**Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling . . .**” Here, the context is obedience to the commands of Christ. And to be obedient means to “work out your salvation.” Now, this “salvation” is not what we already possess in Christ. I believe the context of this “salvation” is a process that we have in this life, a “hope” we have as we look forward to the coming of Christ, and to the completion of our salvation 1 Thess. 5:8-9: “**But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to OBTAIN salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .**” Also, 1 Pet. 1:5 Peter says: we “**who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time . . .**” (this seems to be the context of this passage.) And in 2:2: “**Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation . . .**” I

think verse like this point to the fact that . . . ONE DAY . . . our salvation will be complete. (Recall Rom. 8:28-30 as God will take us all the way to glorification.)

Yes, NOW, in Christ, we are already justified, sanctified, sins forgiven, declared righteous, seated with Him in the heavenly places, etc. As the writer to the Hebrews says, we have “already come to the heavenly city” (Heb. 12:22). But, our glorification is not yet. The consummation of all things is not yet. In the meantime, we . . . WORK. We take part in this process of sanctification. John Murray says, *“The exhortations to action with which the Scripture is pervaded are all to the effect of reminding us that our whole being is intensely active in that process which has as its goal the predestinating purpose of God that we should be conformed to the image of his Son”* (See Rom. 8:29). And, I must point out that our working is not contrary to God’s working. God’s working in us (through the power of the Holy Spirit) is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. We are not merely cooperating with God as if to say, *“Well, God does his part. We do our part.”* NO! God works in us and we also work. And really, the best way to put it is to say that BECAUSA God works, WE work. Look back quickly to Phil. 2:12-13: **“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but 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 work for his good pleasure.”** So, in this way, our “working” is the general means God uses.

And, the Bible has sooo many commands with instructions as to how we are to work. Let me speak to this by way of application for a few minutes. Turn with me to Rom. 12. VV. 1-2 says, **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind . . .”** Here we see that we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. We are told to use our minds not to be conformed to this world. This means that as a Christian, the right use of your body and as part of your body, your mind . . . is essential to your sanctification. (So much here!) Look down at vv. 9-18 for more specifics. **“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”**

In 2 Pet. 1:5-8 we read: **“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they**

keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

On and on I could go. But, THESE are the ways we work out our salvation. But, the command is always for us to WORK.

2. Specific Means. Now, with this in mind, and by way of continued application, in closing this sermon, I want to mention 5 specific means which God uses in our sanctification.

1. Spend time in the Word of God. In John 17:17 Jesus prays to the Father, **“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”**

2. Let your faith be strengthened by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Let me read 2 Cor.

3:16-18. Speaking of the Lord Jesus, Paul says, **“But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”**

3. Always remember your reliance upon the Holy Spirit. 2 Thess. 2:13 says, **“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”**

4. Associate with sanctified people. Prov. 13:20 says, **“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise . . .”** And as Heb. 10:25 says, **“Do not forsake to gather with God’s people.”**

5. Pray for sanctification. I think of Job who prays who says, **“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?”** Well, God can! All of us are a testimony to this truth. And what is God’s will? It is your sanctification. We must pray like King David, **“Create in me a clean heart.”**