

SANCTIFICATION

John 17:17

In the almost seven years that I have been the pastor of First Baptist, there have been a few resources that I have consistently encouraged people to read for spiritual growth. One of those resources is the *Gospel Meditations* booklets that we have given at Mother's Day and Father's Day and range in topics from *prayer*, to *missions*, to those *Hurting*, to *Creation*. In all there have been 11 of these that we have provided over the years to help us learn to be like the Lord.

Another resource that I have encouraged people to read is the various works of JC Ryle. Ryle was a bishop in the Church of England through the mid to late 1800s. His works are usually published by Banner of Truth (out of Carlisle, PA), and over the years, we have considered his works on *prayer*, *inspiration*, and *thoughts for young men*.

One of Ryle's larger works is his book entitled *Holiness*. In many ways, the name says it all as it pursues the various ways God's people can grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Ryle's style of writing is that of a pastor. A scholarly thinker, indeed, he has the ability to put very difficult material in a way that is understandable by all. His tone is never condescending, aggressive, hostile, or even controversial; but it is down to earth and practical. I love to read his writings, and even though I may not agree with everything he says, and some of it may be outdated to our modern day, he is always a help to my mind and an encouragement to my soul. If you have not read him, please let me know, and I will be glad to introduce you to his works.

Recently I was reading Ryle's second chapter of *Holiness* which deals with sanctification. That is the topic I would like to consider in our article today. What is sanctification? Why is it necessary? How is it evidenced in my life? Let's start with Scripture. In our Lord's prayer for His own in John 17, He asks the Father to "*sanctify them [His children] through thy truth; your word is truth.*" In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Paul says, "*for this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.*"

If you were to do a word study of this word in Scripture, you would find that sanctification is defined as making something pure. In terms of people, it is the making of a person righteous. In reality it is a partnership with God as He is the One who takes upon Himself this work through the Holy Spirit. That is the meaning behind 1Thess 5:23 which says, "*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly.*" A better translation would be "*May God, Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you wholly*" (which places emphasis on God's taking interest in our becoming more like Christ). We also notice He is called "*the God of peace*" because it is God who brings peace through Jesus Christ. In sum, what Paul is teaching is this: ***Our sanctification—our becoming more like the Lord—is a work that God Himself is doing because He is the one who is the God of Peace!***

Something else we would discover in our Bible study of this word would be this: There are three parts to our sanctification. 1) There is a positional sanctification (some call it "past sanctification") whereby God made us righteous at our conversion. We are "positionally" safe from the judgment and condemnation of sin. 2) Similarly, when we die, we are given a glorified body which is pure and righteous, free from sin. That is called "glorification" or future sanctification. 3) The third aspect of our sanctification is called "progressive sanctification," and it is the process whereby we are becoming more like Christ. As believers we are constantly growing in grace, we are learning to put off sin and put on Christ, we are in the process of becoming more righteous. This is also referred to as "present sanctification."

To speak of sanctification in terms of a partnership between the believer and God, we look at Scripture to see our role in the process. In Romans, 8:13-14, we are to "mortify" the deeds of the body, but even that is with the help of the Spirit—*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.* ¹⁴ *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* In Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3, we encounter the "put off/put on" passages. And Paul reminds the Philippians that we are to are to "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*" (Phil 2:12-13). In other words, **God energizes us; God encourages us; and God actively helps us to become more like the Lord; yet we have a responsibility to be actively involved in our obedience, our growth in grace, and in our holiness.** Sanctification is not a "Let Go and Let God" disposition. It is active obedience. Wayne Grudem says, "*If we neglect actively striving to obey God, we become lazy Christians. If we neglect the passive role of trusting God and yielding to him, we become proud and*

overly confident in ourselves. In either case our sanctification will be deficient. And if our sanctification is deficient, we won't experience the joy and peace promised to us" (Christian Beliefs, p102).

Now this has been a very brief look into a beautifully deep doctrine of God. Yet in conclusion, we could say this: Because of Christ, we have hope. Jesus paid our sin debt, and all who come to Him, He will in no wise cast out (Jn 6:37). When we become Christians, God's grace is sufficient to save us from all of our sins—past, present, and future. Positionally, we are set free from sin and stand righteous before God; however, while we live, we still have a sin nature that will always dog us, always tempt us to fall away, and always call us to be faithless. Yet as we grow to be more like the Lord, we will find that our sin nature is weakened, and though it will never be completely eradicated this side of heaven, it will be diminished as we become doers of the Word and not hearers only (Jms 1:22). While we live on the earth, we have Christ that saves us, and we have the Holy Spirit to guide and illuminate us in the things of God. We look forward to the day we lay aside our sin for good as we are ushered into the presence of God. In that day we will be eternally saved, sanctified, and free from the possibility to sin, for in that day, our sanctification will be made complete. May the Lord encourage us as we partner with Him to become more of what He wants us to be.