

## SANCTIFICATION

When we put our faith in Christ, God forgives us of our sins and makes us a part of His family. But this is only the beginning of what God wants to do in our lives. Becoming a Christian is only the first step in our walk with God, and many glorious things await us on the path ahead.

God's marvelous plan for our lives encompasses our past, our present and our future (Romans 8:29, 30):

*Justification* -- deliverance from the penalty of sin. Through Christ's death on the cross the sins of our past are forgiven and we are justified (declared righteous) in God's sight.

*Sanctification* -- deliverance from the power of sin. Right now, God is at work sanctifying us, making us more and more like Christ.

*Glorification* -- deliverance from the presence of sin. At Christ's future return, we will be transformed into an immortal state in which we share in the glory of Christ.

It is important for us to realize what God's purpose is for us, in order that we may cooperate with Him and not hinder what He is trying to accomplish in our lives. God's goal is to conform us to the image of Christ, and everything that He brings into our lives or brings us through is meant to take us closer to this end.

Understanding what God has in mind for us, we must give ourselves fully to the accomplishing of this purpose. It is not enough simply to sit back and wait for God to do it all; we must focus our desires and devote our energies toward reaching the goal God has set for us (Philippians 3:12-14).

### **Why do we need to be sanctified?**

After we become Christians, shall we go on living just as before? Since God has forgiven our sins, shall we just keep on sinning (Romans 6:1)? Of course not! God has better things in

mind for us than that. God's goal for His people is nothing less than holiness (Hebrews 12:14). God wants us to live lives that reflect His righteousness and glorify Him (Matthew 5:48).

However, there is a problem that hinders this purpose of God for us. In fact, *we* are the problem! The sins we committed have been forgiven, but the sinner who committed them remains. The source of our sin problem lies within our own hearts (Matthew 15:18-19).

When we are born again, the Spirit of God gives us new life. But the old habits, attitudes and thought-patterns remain. And so a conflict arises between the old life and the new (Galatians 5:17). There is a struggle within us, as both the old nature and the new nature strive for mastery in our lives.

### **What can be done about the problem of our sin nature?**

God did not intend for us to be mired in a continual state of conflict over the issue of sin. He did not intend for us to live defeated lives, but to have victory over the sin that dwells within us. In fact, God dealt with our need for sanctification at the same time and in the same way as He dealt with our need for forgiveness: through the death of Christ on the cross.

When Christ was crucified, He died in our place. This means not only that He died as our *substitute*, taking upon Himself the penalty due our sins, but also that He died as our *representative*, undergoing death on our behalf. His death is *our* death.

God has passed sentence upon us as sinners: the sentence of death (Romans 6:23). That sentence was carried out when Christ was crucified. When we put our faith in Christ, we are united with Him; thus, His death on the cross becomes our death as well (Romans 6:3). The sinner that you used to be, the sinner that is the source of all the problems with sin in your life, has been put to death on the cross of Christ.

God's method of dealing with our sinful selves is not to strengthen us so as to enable us to resist sin, but rather to put us to

death so that sin will no longer have us in its power (Romans 6:6-7). Our deliverance from sin comes in the form of death. In Christ we die unto sin, in order that we may live for God (Romans 6:8-11).

### **How can we experience deliverance from sin?**

We obtain deliverance from sin's power in just the same way we obtain forgiveness: through faith in Christ. We believe that Christ's death paid the penalty for our sins, and so we are forgiven. We believe that in Christ our sinful nature was put to death, and so we are dead to sin. In both cases, we appropriate what Christ has done and count on it to be true, not just for mankind in general, but for us personally (Romans 6:11). As salvation is work of God's grace, so also this death to sin is a work of God's grace.

Here is where the problem comes in: most of us don't want to die. Before we can receive forgiveness in Christ, we must be willing to confess our sins. In the same way, before we can be delivered from sin's power, we must be willing to assent to the death of our old, sinful selves. We must die so that Christ may live in us.

What does it mean to give ourselves up unto death? It means not holding on to any sin, but letting go and allowing every unholy desire in us to die. It means no longer running our own lives, but taking ourselves out of the way in order to make room for Christ to reign.

We cannot hope to find deliverance from sin's power as long as we insist on maintaining control of our own lives. If we try to be our own master, we will only end up as slaves to sin (John 8:34). We can find freedom from sin only in offering ourselves as slaves unto God (Romans 6:16).

One meaning of the New Testament word for sanctify is "to set apart." If we consecrate our bodies to God and set them apart for His use, they will no longer be available to be used by sin (Romans 6:13).

Sanctification has both a negative and a positive aspect. It means saying "no" to sin, and "yes" to God. Both of these are essential. We cannot serve God unless we have given up sin. We cannot be free from sin unless we allow God to become our new master (Colossians 3:9-10). But if we are willing, Christ's death to sin becomes ours, and His life for God becomes ours as well (Romans 6:8-10).

### **Does sanctification mean we no longer sin?**

Sanctification is not sinless perfection. We never reach the place in this life where we *cannot* sin. We never get beyond the reach of temptation, but must always be vigilant so that we do not fall into sin. We can always choose to submit to sin's power; we can still say "yes" to it.

On the other hand, it is not true that as long as we are in this life we *must* sin. God has provided for us a means of deliverance through Christ's death for us and His life in us. We can live in victory over sin; we can say "no" to it.

### **Is sanctification a once-for-all experience or a lifetime process?**

It is a combination of both. We enter into the experience of sanctification through a crisis decision of consecration, but the process continues throughout our lives as God works to conform us to the image of Christ.

Broadly speaking, we can identify four stages of God's sanctifying work in our lives:

1. The new birth, when our sins are forgiven and we are washed clean from the stain of sin (Titus 3:5).

2. A crisis experience of sanctification when we count ourselves dead to sin, its power over us is broken, and our hearts are purified (Romans 6:11; Acts 15:9; James 4:8).

3. Continual spiritual growth, as day-by-day we mature and become more and more like Christ (John 17:17; Hebrews 6:1).

4. Glorification, when we see Christ face to face and are finally perfected (1 John 3:2).

### **What happens if we sin?**

If we do sin, it is not the end. We have not lost our salvation. Christ continues to pray for us, for our forgiveness and restoration (1 John 2:1). But sin breaks our fellowship with God, and puts us in danger of leaving the path and wandering away from God for good. Therefore sin should be confessed immediately, so that we can receive God's forgiveness and our relationship with Him can be restored right away. We must not allow our sin to drive us away from God out of shame or fear. Rather, sin should drive us to Him for forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9).

Sin is serious business. It must never be taken lightly, for it is deadly and can destroy the soul. But we need not despair, for God's grace is greater than our sin (Romans 5:20-21). If we turn to Him in repentance and faith, He will restore us.

### **What is the sanctified life like?**

The sanctified life is not stuffy, solemn and holier-than-thou. We are not talking about a legalism that judges oneself and others on the basis of mere outward do's and don'ts (Colossians 2:20-23). The focus is on the inner condition of the heart, where true holiness shines forth in joyful freedom and love for others (Galatians 5:13-14).

The sanctified life is a Christ-like life, where the positive qualities of Christ's character are seen in us (Galatians 5:22-24). Indeed, the sanctified life is Christ's life in us, as Paul explains in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in

the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

The sanctified life is an exchanged life: I trade my sinful life for Christ's righteous one. I die in Him; He lives in me. Thank God that He has provided a way out of sin's dreadful bondage, through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:25)!

FOR FURTHER STUDY

**Read John 15:1-11.**

1. Who is the vine? Who are the branches? Who is the gardener?
2. What can we do on our own, apart from Christ?
3. How can we bear fruit?
4. What does it mean to “abide in Christ”?
5. What does the Father do to make us more fruitful?