

Lesson 10

Sanctification in Daily Life

Introduction

Sanctification is very much a theological term. We don't use it too much in our daily vocabulary. When we speak of it we are describing the ongoing development of holy character and conduct as taught and commanded by the word of God. It includes the conquering of sin and eradicating it from one's life. It also involves positive growth in moral virtue, i.e., a growing evidence of the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5.22-23. It is the equivalent of obeying God's will and doing good works.

The new lifestyle described above is not an option. It is commanded:

- 1 Peter 1.15: *be holy.*
- Matthew 5.48: *be perfect.*
- 2 Peter 3.18: *grow in grace.*
- Philippians 2.12: *work out your own salvation.*
- Romans 6.12: *do not allow sin to reign in your mortal body.*
- 1 Thessalonians 5.22: *abstain from every form of evil.*
- James 4.7-8: *submit therefore to God. Resist the devil ... cleanse your hands you sinners.*
- Romans 12.9: *abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.*
- Ephesians 5.1: *be imitators of God.*
- 1 Corinthians 6.20: *glorify God in your body.*
- Matthew 6.33: *seek first the kingdom and His righteousness.*

These are commands that must be followed. Sanctification is our responsibility ... it will happen only as a result of our free-will decision and effort.

But there is obviously more. Though God has placed the responsibility on us, He has not left us alone to accomplish it on our own. We have power from outside ourselves to conquer sin and be holy as God is holy. This power comes by the Spirit who resides in us, who works in us indirectly by the Word as well as working directly on our hearts in order to impact our will.

As we go through the remainder of this lesson we will explore how the Spirit works through both of these methods to go with us through the process of sanctification.

The Spirit Sanctifies Through the Word

Just as He works through the Word upon the hearts of sinners to lead them to faith and repentance, so He also works through the word on the hearts of Christians to teach them the word of God and motivate them to obey it. This is the answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17.17: *sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.*

Sanctification involves our obligation to become holy even as God is holy, 1 Peter 1.15-16. Thus, the goal for sanctification is no less than the very nature of God. Hence, the more we know about God's moral nature, the more we will know what we are supposed to be like. This knowledge comes from God's word, which teaches us about God's moral character. The commandments of His law are basically His perfect moral character put into verbal form. The moral law is the primary source of our knowledge of His holiness or sanctification. In order to imitate God's holiness, we must look to His law and obey His law.

What does the Bible say regarding itself?

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness,

– 2 Timothy 3.16

Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.

– Psalm 119.105

God's word is the standard for our sanctification. We must apply it.

Sanctification is not something the Spirit does without our participation and cooperation. God's word is essential for it, but it does no good at all if we refuse to study and meditate on its application for our lives. *How can we expect to be holy and do God's will if we neglect the God-given means of grace and rarely read the only Book which shows us what holiness is?*

The Spirit Gives us the Power to Obey

It should be stressed that the Spirit does not give us more knowledge than what is available in Scripture. When we speak of being *led by the Spirit*, we do not mean that the Spirit somehow speaks to us on a conscious or unconscious level, in order to tell us what to do or show us God's will. Rather than the revelation of additional knowledge, the Spirit's sanctifying work is *power*. In other words, He empowers our spirits to overcome sin and live in obedience to the will of God. In doing so, the Spirit works directly on our heart in a way similar to His work of regeneration. In sanctification, the Spirit continues to reinforce our recovering souls, like medicine in a sick body restores the body's own ability to fight disease and recover its health.

Dwelling within our bodies, the Spirit is in constant contact with our spirits, providing us an immediate reservoir of strength for our spiritual battles. Even after we have been regenerated and received initial sanctification, we are still in a state of weakness. As long as we are in the world and in our fleshly body, we will continue to experience the weakening impact of sin. This is why we need the Spirit. *The Spirit helps us in our weakness*, Romans 8.26. The help promised here should not just be seen with regard to prayer, rather it is a general principle that applies far beyond.

This is the point of Ephesians 3.16

I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit,

– Ephesians 3.16

Here Paul is speaking of the moral power to overcome sin. This is obvious when considering the general thrust of Ephesians.

The Spirit Empowers us to Fight Against Sin

In Romans 8.13 Paul instructs that we must *put to death the deeds of the body*. These are the sinful deeds that result from the law of sin that continues to reside in our flesh, in our as-yet-unredeemed bodies, Romans 6.6; 7.18; 23-25. These sins must be put to death, killed, destroyed, overcome, and driven from our lives. How can we do this? Paul clearly says in Romans 8.13 that we do this *by the Spirit*. The indwelling Spirit is the key to our victory over sin. In this we are choosing to fight sin as hard as we can, while simultaneously, the Spirit's energizing power is making this possible.

The Spirit helps us obey God's commands

In Philippians 2.12 Paul wrote that we must work out our salvation *with fear and trembling*. Think of the overwhelming responsibility we have to be holy. It's daunting, especially when we consider the reality of sin. But we must not stop at v. 12. Paul goes on to say, *For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*. God Himself, in the person of the Spirit, is at work within you, to help you *want* to do what is right and to help you actually *do it*.

It is clear from these passages that the work of the Spirit within us consists of strengthening with might the inner man, and in helping our infirmities. We don't need the Spirit's aid to give us new ideas or teach new lessons. All we need in this way has been given to us abundantly in the Word. What we need is the strength to do what we already know we should do. It has been said, *how ready we all are to resolve to do right, yet how unequal to the task of performing*. This is the very reason God gave us the Spirit . . . to help us in our weakness.

The indwelling Spirit is not just an aggressive force leading the human spirit against the flesh, but it is "also a constructive power which builds up a new life within, cooperating with the Spirit of man in the work of restoring human life to the image of God. The Holy Spirit builds up the ruins of our spiritual nature, restoring the Divine life in man."⁷⁵

Conclusion

These thoughts should be awesome indeed! We have the *Holy Spirit* Himself dwelling in us; and that through Him we have *God's own power* enabling us to be holy, even as God is holy! No wonder we approach the task of sanctification with *fear and trembling*, Philippians 2.12. Again, all this power is useless unless we exercise our own wills and actively *pursue sanctification*, Hebrews 12.14. The power is there, but we must claim it and allow it to work within us. We must pray for its application, as Paul did in Ephesians 3.16. We must be *putting to death the deeds of the body*, Romans 8.13. *To be holy*, in 1 Peter

⁷⁵ Swete, Henry Barclay. *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament: A Study of Primitive Christian Teaching*. London: Macmillan, 1921, p. 344-346.

1.15 is an imperative, a command to be obeyed. We must work out our own salvation as it relates to sanctification, Philippians 2.12. We are not puppets mechanically controlled by the Spirit.

And yet, we must at the same time acknowledge and remember that we can actually do these things only through the power of the Spirit who dwells within us. *Work out your salvation, yes, but it is God who is at work in you*, Philippians 2.12-13. Put sin to death, yes, but *by the Spirit*, Romans 8.13. It has been said, *There is not the slightest doubt that the New Testament requires vigorous effort on the part of the believer. But the point is that this effort is to be made in the strength of the divine Spirit, not in the energy of the flesh.*⁷⁶

For Thought and Reflection

1. What is a good definition of *sanctification*?
2. What are some Scriptures that demonstrate the obligation of the new Christian lifestyle?
3. Whose responsibility does sanctification involve?
4. From where does our knowledge of God's morality come?
5. What does Scripture say regarding itself?
6. Does the Spirit ever give us more knowledge than is available through the Word? Explain.

⁷⁶ Morris, p. 78.

7. Why do we need power from an outside source in order to fully obey God?

8. By what power do we overcome sin? See Romans 8.13.

9. How does the Spirit help us obey God's commands? See Philippians 2.12-13.

10. How does Romans 8.26a give you encouragement?

11. Is there anything that you have studied in this lesson that would negate your own personal freewill in pursuing sanctification? If not, what does this mean?