

20. Explain the synergistic nature of sanctification being sure to describe the relationship between God's grace and moral effort in the Christian life.

I. Breakdown the Question

- A. Define sanctification.
- B. Define synergistic.
- C. Explain how God's grace and the believer's effort work together (synergistically) to bring about change and growth.

II. Define sanctification

- A. "God's setting apart believers as holy for the purpose of displaying his holiness in their lives. He does this through the finished work of Jesus Christ. As believers are justified by God through the work of Jesus Christ, they are united to him in his life, death, and resurrection; thus, they die to sin and live to righteousness. A sanctification is fundamentally an act of God by which believers respond cooperatively."¹
- B. Ligonier Ministries "... sanctification is 'the work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness. It is a continuing change worked by God in us, freeing us from sinful habits and forming in us Christlike affections, dispositions, and virtues. It does not mean that the sin is instantly eradicated, but it is also more than a counteraction in which sin is merely restrained or repressed without being progressively destroyed. Sanctification is a real transformation, not just the appearance of one.'"²
- C. Sanctification is the act of setting something apart as holy or for a holy purpose. Before God had created the heavens and the earth, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit determined to set aside a chosen people for himself and established a plan to accomplish this. This work has been, is, and will be fully accomplished by God.
 - 1. **2 Timothy 2:21** *Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*
 - 2. **1 Thessalonians 5:23** *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.*

III. Define Synergistic

- A. Synergistic or synergy is defined as "the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects."³
- B. Monergism is when only one agent attempts to complete a task. In the context of sanctification, if man alone was responsible for their own sanctification, man would have a total inability to attain holiness or sanctification. This perspective could be thought of as, "God helps those who help themselves." Conversely, if God alone was responsible for man's sanctification, and man has no part in it, then there would be no action by us, no

¹ Jeremy Pierre, On-line Lecture, *Lecture 7: A Match Made Somewhere in the General Vicinity Below Heaven.*

² What is Sanctification? *Ligonier Ministries*, <https://www.ligonier.org/posts/what-sanctification>.

³ Synergy Defined, *Oxford Languages On-line*.

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denying oneself and following Christ, no putting off of sin and putting on biblical principles. This perspective could be thought of as, “Let go and let God.” Both of these approaches are wrong. Instead, sanctification is a cooperative, or synergistic, effort with both God and man working together to produce a combined effort to make man more holy and less sinful.

- C. If sanctification is synergistic and requires the cooperation of both God and Man, then you can see that there must be a distinct separation between sanctification and justification. If justification required a cooperative effort of both God and man, then man would be, at least to some degree, responsible for their own salvation. However, the Scriptures teach that God is the author of our salvation and has accomplished all the work necessary for salvation through Christ, and that the Holy Spirit has caused us to be born again.
1. **Psalm 3:8** *Salvation belongs to the LORD;*
 2. **Romans 9:18** *So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.*
 3. **Ezekiel 36:26-27** *Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.*
- IV. **Explain how God’s grace and the believer’s effort work together (synergistically) to bring about change and growth.**
- A. Grudem “Some (such as John Murray) object to saying that God and man ‘cooperate’ in sanctification, because they want to insist that God’s work is primary and our work in sanctification is only a secondary one (see Phil. 2:12-13). However, if we explain the nature of God’s role and our role in sanctification clearly, it does not seem inappropriate to say that God and man cooperate in sanctification. God works in our sanctification and we work as well, and we work for the same purpose. We are not saying that we have equal roles in sanctification or that we both work in the same way, but simply that we cooperate with God in ways that are appropriate to our status as God’s creatures. And the fact that Scripture emphasizes the role that we play in sanctification (with all the moral commands of the New Testament), makes it appropriate to teach that God calls us to cooperate with him in this activity.”⁴
- B. What is God the Father’s role in the sanctification of man?
1. Grudem “One specific role of God the Father in this sanctification is his process of disciplining us as his children (see Heb 12:5-11).”⁵
 - a. **Hebrews 12:5-11** *and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.” It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But*

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 753.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 753.

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if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

2. Grudem “Paul tells the Philippians, ‘*God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*’ (Phil. 2:13), thus indicating something of the way in which God sanctifies them—both by causing them to want his will and by giving them power to do it. The author of Hebrews speaks of the role of the Father and the role of the Son in a familiar benediction: ‘Now may the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever (Heb 13:20-21).’⁶

C. What is God the Son’s role in the sanctification of man?

1. Grudem “The role of God the Son, Jesus Christ, in sanctification is, first, that he *earned* our sanctification for us.”⁷
 - a. **1 Corinthians 1:30** *And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,*
2. Grudem “Moreover, in the process of sanctification, Jesus is also our *example*, for we are to run the race of life ‘looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith’ (Heb 12:2).”⁸
 - a. **1 Peter 2:21** *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*
 - b. **1 John 2:6** *whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

D. What is God the Holy Spirit’s role in the sanctification of man?

1. Grudem “*But it is specifically God the Holy Spirit who works within us to change us and sanctify us, giving us greater holiness of life. Peter speaks of the ‘sanctification of the Spirit’ (1 Peter 1:2, author’s translation), and Paul speaks of ‘sanctification by the Spirit’ (2 Thess. 2:13). It is the Holy Spirit who produces in us the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:22-23), those character traits that are part of greater and greater sanctification. If we grow in sanctification we ‘walk by the Spirit’ and are ‘led by the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:16-18; cf. Rom. 8:14), that is, we are more and more responsive to the desires and promptings of the*

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 753.

⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 753.

⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 754.

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Holy Spirit in our life and character. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of holiness, and he produces holiness within us."⁹

E. What is man's role in the sanctification of man?

1. Grudem "The role that we play is sanctification is both a *passive* one in which we depend on God to sanctify us, and an *active* one in which we strive to obey God and take steps that will increase our sanctification . . . First, what may be called the 'passive' role that we play in sanctification is seen in texts that encourage us to trust God and to pray and ask that he sanctify us. Paul tells his readers, '*Yield yourselves to God* as men who have been brought from death to life' (Rom. 6:13; cf. v. 19), and he tells the Roman Christians, 'Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God' (Rom. 12:1). Paul realizes that we are dependent on the Holy Spirit's work to grow in sanctification, because he says, 'If *by the Spirit* you put to death the deeds of the body you will live' (Rom. 8:13)."¹⁰
 - a. **Genesis 6:5** *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*
 - b. **Ezekiel 36:26-27** *Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.*
2. Grudem "That active role which we are to play is indicated by Romans 8:13, where Paul says, 'If by the Spirit *you* put to death the deeds of the body you will live.' Here Paul acknowledges that it is 'by the Spirit' that we are able to do this. But he also says we must do it! It is not the Holy Spirit who is commanded to put to death the deeds of the flesh, but Christians! Similarly, Paul tells the Philippians, '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 God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:12-13)."¹¹
3. Grudem "The New Testament does not suggest any short-cuts by which we can grow in sanctification, but simply encourages us repeatedly to give ourselves to the old-fashioned, time-honored means of bible reading and meditation (Ps 1:2; Matt 4:4; John 17:17), prayer (Eph 6:18; Phil 4:6), worship (Eph 5:18-20), witnessing (Matt 28:19-20), Christian fellowship (Heb 10:24-25), and self-discipline or self-control (Gal 5:23; Titus 1:8)."¹²
 - a. **Ephesians 4:11-32** *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that*

⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 754.

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 754.

¹¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 754-755.

¹² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 755.

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we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

- F. Why are we being sanctified? Or why is sanctification important?
1. A true and sincere desire to please and obey God.
 - a. **John 14:15** *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*
 - b. **John 14:21** *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.*
 2. The desire to be an instrument in the hands of the redeemer, used to further the kingdom of God here on earth.
 - a. **2 Timothy 2:20-21** *Now in a great house there are not only vessels of God and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*
 3. To be a living example for unbelievers to see. Witnessing through our lives.

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- a. **1 Peter 3:1-2** *Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.*
 - b. **1 Peter 3:15-16** *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,*
4. The desire for peace and joy in our earthly lives.
- a. **Philippians 4:9** *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*
 - b. **Hebrews 12:1-2** *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

V. Suggested Reading:

- A. **Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Zondervan, 1994), 746-758.**
- B. Heath Lambert, *Theology of Biblical Counseling* (Zondervan, 2016), 290-293.
- C. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2018), 527-544.