

# **We Believe: Doctrines of Our Faith**

## **The Doctrine of Sanctification**

### **I. Some Mentally Stimulating Questions:**

Why are we left on earth after we accept Christ?

What does it matter that we grow as Christians when we will all get to go to heaven anyway?

What is our motivation for growing continually when we know we will never reach perfection in our lives?

How much Christian growth is “good enough”?

### **II. Beginning at the Beginning**

Genesis 1–2 presents a vision of humanity as God originally intended us to be.

We alone among all of the created order are made in the image of God. We are His chosen creatures to represent Him to all of creation.

We are given the task of ruling, subduing, and cultivating. As we spread across the face of the world, we were meant to take the Garden with us by living under God's authority, in relationship with Him, and reigning according to His wisdom.

Genesis 3 explains where we failed by seizing autonomy and deciding we could rule the world by our own wisdom apart from God.

The lone description of the Tree of Knowledge that differed from the other fruit trees is that Eve saw it as "desirable to make one wise."

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, their relationship with each other and with God was broken. They suddenly saw a need to hide from each other and to differentiate their outward presentation from their inward thoughts. They became personally fractured.

Most of human history is the sad story of our feeble, failing attempts to get back to true humanity by gaining realignment individually and in our relationships through our own wisdom and our own devices.

### **III. A People Set Apart**

As God works with humanity in His redemptive story, He consistently sets people apart to be His own possession (that is, "sanctified": set apart or made holy) in order to demonstrate His desire to recreate true humanity through them.

Genesis 12 gives us Abram's call out of Babylon to a new land very much like the Garden. He promises to bless those who bless Abram and curse those who curse him.

Throughout Abram's wandering in the land, many people see that he is blessed and want to connect to him so that they can get the blessing as well. At the same time, Abram is far from an example of perfect humanity.

God takes the entire nation of Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus and makes a covenant with them. If they will be the kind of people He wants them to be, then He will bless them immensely such that the nation around them will recognize their God through their true humanity and wisdom.

Exodus 19:3–6 begins the process of God covenanting with Israel so that, if they obey Him, they will be a "nation of priests."

The next generation of Israel stand at the edge of the land as Moses tells them in Deuteronomy 4:5–8 that they can be a light to the nations by displaying great wisdom and righteousness in obedience to God’s covenant.

As the story of Israel continues, the idea that we should be set apart for God in order to shine light or to bless those around us only deepens. Take, for example, the words of Psalm 1, where the one who lives by the law of God will flourish like a Tree of Life.

#### **IV. Ethics for True Humanity**

When Jesus goes up on the mountain in Matthew 5 to give His famous Sermon, His message is not brand new. It is a reminder and an explanation of what we were created to be.

Those who belong to the kingdom are “the salt of the earth” and a “city on a hill” (i.e., like Zion). As God had intended with Israel to draw all nations to Himself through a set-apart people, so He calls Christians into the same role (see also Matt 28:19–20).

The ethical content of the Sermon is entirely focused on removing the fractured duplicity we have that began in the Garden. We are to be the same inwardly as we are outwardly (that is how our righteousness surpasses the Pharisees), and we are to be radically dependent on God’s provisions just as Adam and Eve were in the Garden.

Jesus ends the Sermon by saying that wisdom and life depend on following His words.

The Kingdom of God, as Jesus preached it through His parables and direct teachings, is a reversal of the wisdom of this world.

The people who belong to it are compelled by their love of God to be the kinds of true image-bearing representatives that God calls them to be with the hope that they will draw others to God as well.

#### **V. Sanctification and Salvation (Romans 6)**

The entry point for sanctification is and has always been justification (salvation through faith). Justification allows freedom from slavery to sin and death

Once we have been justified, though, we become something new (see, for example, 2 Cor 5:17). It makes no sense to continue acting as though we remain in the death we have been raised from.

Sanctification—setting ourselves apart by our obedience to God and embodying true humanity—is the natural response to understanding salvation. It makes no sense to claim to be saved and yet to live in the death of slavery to sin.

## **VI. Implications for Eternity**

We will all get to go to heaven, so what does it really matter?

The New Testament gives glimpses of how our experience of eternity is impacted by our sanctification in this life. It does seem that we will experience eternity differently depending on how we grow in sanctification now.

Jesus says that anyone who wants to be great in God's kingdom must be the servant of all in this life. When asked by James and John about sitting with Him in the kingdom, Jesus says that the Father has the authority to make that choice (Mark 10:35–45), but that their responsibility is to model citizenship in His kingdom now.

Paul says that we all build on the foundation of the gospel with some materials: either gold, silver, and precious stones or wood, hay, and stubble. In the end, our house will be set on fire and only what survives will be of profit. Some will be saved only “as one escaping through the flames” (1 Cor 3:10–15).

John, in his addresses to the churches in Revelation, quotes Jesus' promise to reward those who persevere under the persecution and temptations they face in their various cultural situations (Rev 2–3).

### **Sanctification has three compelling aspects:**

- (1) It is our only means of becoming the types of humans we all know deep down inside we want to be: humans who love God with all of our heart, soul, and strength and who love our neighbor as ourselves.
- (2) It is the natural and sole proper response to understanding our justification through faith in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.
- (3) We are promised an existence in eternity that will be impacted by the kind of life we live now. God promises to reward those who live as set-apart people for His possession.