**Sanctification (2)**

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**John 17:17**

Jesus the Christ (Gk. *Christos*: the Anointed One, the Messiah), the Son of God (*i.e.*, God manifested in the flesh), made a number of exceedingly significant statements during His ministry prior to being crucified on Calvary.

Near the end of Christ’s earthly ministry to Israel, when it was quite apparent that as a nation repentance would not take place and “*when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father*” (John 13:1), Christ covered a number of issues with His disciples (John 17:13-17). Before Christ “*went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron*, *where there was a garden* (Gethsemane), *which He and His disciples entered*” (John 18:1), He “*lifted up His eyes to heaven*, *and*” (John 17:1) prayed to God the Father regarding Himself (John 17:1-5), His disciples (John 17:6-19), and all believers who would eventually believe in Him (John 17:20-26).

During Christ prayer regarding His disciples, He made the following request, which was not only definitive but also quite enlightening in nature:

*Sanctify them by Your truth*. *Your Word is truth*. (John 17:17)

Regarding Christians, there is probably no brief verse of Scripture so revealing, so informative as this verse of Scripture. For contained in it is the precise means by which a Christian may grow from the initial state of spiritual immaturity at the time of his “*birth from above*” (salvation of his spirit) to a state of spiritual maturity in which he may be assured of the salvation of his soul.

(For an in-depth understanding of the comprehensive plan of redemption provided by God for mankind, involving the entire person, the tripartite nature of man of spirit, soul, and body as detailed in Scripture [1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrew 4:12; *etc*.], the reader is advised to read [Bible One - Arlen Chitwood's Salvation of the Soul](http://bibleone.net/SOS.htm).)

Here Christ addresses the concept of “sanctification” (Gk. *hagiasmos* – to be “set apart” – a separation from what is sinful and an attachment to what is righteous), which is the “*will of God*” for every Christian.

*Finally then*, *brethren*, *we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more*, *just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God* . . . *For this is the will of God*, *your sanctification* . . . . (1 Thessalonians 4:1, 3a)

Just as the doctrine of “salvation” is discussed in Scripture as being applicable to all facets of tripartite man (spirit, soul, and body), so it is with the doctrine of “sanctification” (instantaneously and permanently to the “*spirit*” (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 10:10;1 Peter 1:2a), eventually to the “*body*” (1 Corinthians 15:49-54; Philippians 3:21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 John 3:2), but progressively during a person’s corporal life to the “*soul*”(Philippians 2:12-13; Ephesians 5:26; 1 Thessalonians 4:3a).

The aspect of sanctification mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 addresses the sanctification of the soul. The doctrine of *sanctification*, as taught in the Bible, is a triune concept. It is very important that the student of the Word differentiates which type of *sanctification* is being addressed in any particular passage of Scripture, which can be done by examining the context of the passage under consideration.

Robert B. Thieme, Jr., who pastored the Berachah Church in Houston, Texas before his death, taught this triune doctrine, calling the facets of it as *Positional*, *Experiential*, and *Ultimate*. The following is a brief excerpt from his teaching:

1. Positional sanctification signifies that every believer at the moment of salvation acquires the status quo of being set apart in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:2; Hebrews 10:10; Colossians 2:10). At the moment a person believes in Christ as Savior, he is entered into union with Christ; he shares all that Christ has and is; he is a partaker of the divine nature.

1. Experiential sanctification is the function of the spiritual life after salvation that involves the believer’s spiritual growth by means of the filling of the Holy Spirit and the grace apparatus for perception (Ephesians 5:26). The key to be sanctified in Phase Two (Phase One, the moment of salvation; Phase Two, the life of the believer, which begins immediately after salvation and continues until either physical death or the Rapture . . . ; and Phase Three, eternity in heaven) is the proper use of 1 John 1:9 and learning Bible doctrine. This produces spiritual maturity.

1. Ultimate sanctification is the status quo of every believer in his resurrection body in the eternal state (1 Corinthians 15:35-54; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2). We will be set apart unto God for all eternity. We are assured of living in God’s presence forever.

All three aspects of the doctrine can be seen in 1 Corinthians 1:30-31:

*But of Him you are in Christ Jesus*, *who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness* [Spirit/Positional] *and sanctification* [Soul/Experiential] *and redemption* [Body/Ultimate] *– that*, *as it is written*,” *He who glories*, *let him glory in the LORD*.”

In the verse under consideration (John 17:17), Christ is speaking specifically of sanctification of the soul, *i.e.*, that which will produce the salvation of the soul, which will determine a believer’s position and participation in the coming kingdom during the Messianic Era. For the Christian living today, this is the primary, the only facet of sanctification with which to be concerned.

God’s purpose for and in the sanctification of His children is that they might be *transformed* and *conformed into the image of His Son*, *Jesus Christ*. Sanctification is the process by which Christians are to be shaped or fashioned into Christ’s image.

*For whom He* [God the Father] *foreknew*, *He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son* . . . *And do not be conformed to this world*, *but be transformed by the renewing of your mind* . . . . (Romans 8:29; 12:2 [29a])

*But we all*, *with unveiled face*, *beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord*, *are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory*, *just as by the Spirit of the Lord*. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Soul (Experiential) Sanctification

*Soul* (Experiential) *Sanctification* is not vicarious (cannot be transferred or imputed) but is accrued progressively (moment-by-moment) as a result of the Christian’s obedience under the influence of the Holy Spirit to God’s will *as revealed in His Word*.

It is also known as *Christian growth*, maturing in the faith. Most significantly, it is a *balance* or *union* between God’s sovereign work by His Spirit and man’s responsiveness (will), as seen in Philippians 2:12-13:

*Therefore*, *my beloved, as you have always obeyed*, *not as in my presence only*, *but now much more in my absence*, *work out* [Gk. *katergazomai* – cultivate] *your own salvation with fear and trembling*; *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*.

The concept in this passage is similar to a farmer who owns a field. The field is his possession, but what is produced on it depends on how he cultivates it. The field can produce little to nothing, or it can bring forth a rich crop. It all depends on the farmer and how he cultivates it. For Christians, there is always God’s way of cultivating and man’s way of cultivating. God’s way is always to work *through* the believer, which produces *divine good* (works accomplished by faith under the power of the Holy Spirit with proper motivation on the part of the Christian and which will always glorify Jesus Christ). Man’s way is to function under his own will and self-effort, which produces *human good* (works conducted under his own power with improper motivation and which glorify only man, definitely not Christ).

*Soul* (Experiential) *Sanctification* always correlates to the production of *divine good*, which will result in eternal rewards (not eternal life) as is expressed in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15:

*For no other foundation* [Spirit (Positional) Sanctification] *can anyone lay than that which is laid*, *which is Jesus Christ*. *Now if anyone builds* [Soul (Experiential) Sanctification] *on this foundation with gold*, *silver*, *precious stones* [divine good], *wood, hay, straw* [human good],*each* one’s *work will become clear*; *for the Day* [of Judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10)] *will declare it*, *because it will be revealed by fire*; *and the fire will test each* one’s *work*, *of what sort it is*. *If* anyone’s *work which he has built on it endures* [divine good], *he will receive a reward*. *If anyone*’*s work is burned* [human good], *he will suffer loss*; *but he himself will be saved* [Body (Ultimate) Sanctification], *yet so as through fire*.

**Essentials of Soul (Experiential) Sanctification**

The essential aspects of *soul* (*experiential*) *sanctification*, which are inviolable, are as follows:

1. Grounded in the Word of God

This was the thrust of Christ’s prayer in John 17:17. Sanctification can only come by absorption and application of *truth*, God’s Word, the written Word, the direct reflection of the Living Word (John 1:17; 14:6).

*Sanctification*, the *only path* to spiritual maturity, cannot be achieved apart from an in-depth understanding of God’s Word. It is serious error on the part of any Christian who believes it can be done otherwise. It is only through the continuous study of God’s Word that one learns and can therefore emulate the “*mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16).

*Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness*, *and receive with meekness the implanted Word*, *which is able to save your souls*. (James 1:21)

*Sanctify them by Your truth*. *Your Word is Truth*. (John 17:17)

*. . . Christ also loved the Church* [all believers] *and gave Himself for her*, *that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word*. (Ephesians 5:25-26)

*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren*, *love one another fervently with a pure heart*, *having been born again* [from above], *not of corruptible seed but incorruptible*, *through the Word of God which lives and abides forever*. (1 Peter 1:22, 23)

*How can a young man cleanse his way*? *By taking heed according to Your Word*. (Psalms 119:9)

*Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God*, *to a perfect man*, *to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*. (Ephesians 4:13)

2. Apprehended by Faith

It is an error of the most egregious degree when a child of God, having apprehended eternal salvation *by faith alone*, to then attempt to achieve *sanctification* by self-effort. God abhors man’s efforts to please him through man’s will and strength (*i.e.*, by means of *Legalism* – the observance of God’s moral law and one’s own adopted taboos).

*But we are all like an unclean thing*, *and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags* . . . . (Isaiah 64:6a)

God intends that the only way a person can be saved is *by faith alone in Christ alone*, and He intends that the only way a person can progressively achieve *sanctification* is by faith alone in God’s Word – one must simply believe what God has said about a matter, any matter.

*As* [in the same manner] *you have therefore received* [by faith alone] *Christ Jesus the Lord*, *so* [in this same way – by faith] *walk in Him.* (Colossians 2:6)

*I have been crucified with Christ*; *it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*; *and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God*, *who loved me and gave Himself for me*. (Galatians 2:20)

*For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith* [starts and ends with faith]; *as it is written*, *“The just shall live by faith*.” (Romans 1:17, *cf.* Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38)

*Trust* [have faith] *in the LORD with all your heart*, *and lean not on your own understanding*; *in all your ways acknowledge Him*, *and He shall direct your paths*. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

*Commit your way to the LORD*, *trust* [have faith] *also in Him*, *and He shall bring it to pass*. *He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light*, *and your justice as the noonday*. *Rest* [have confidence or faith] *in the LORD*, *and wait patiently for Him*. . . . (Psalm 37:5-7a)

3. Conducted in the power of the Holy Spirit

The only enabling power capable of producing *divine good* is the Holy Spirit. At the moment a person accepts Jesus Christ by faith alone for his personal salvation, he is born of the Holy Spirit who immediately enters and takes up dwelling in the believer, immersing (baptizing) him into the Body of Christ, as well as “sealing” the believer for the Day of Redemption and grants him spiritual gifts for Christian service (*not personal recognition*).

*The wind blows where it wishes*, *and you hear the sound of it*, *but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes*. *So is everyone who is born of the Spirit*. (John 3:8)

*But this He spoke concerning the Spirit*, *whom those believing in Him would receive*; *for the Holy Spirit was not yet given*, *because Jesus was not yet glorified.* (John 7:39)

*Now hope does not disappoint*, *because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*. (Romans 5:5)

*But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit*, *if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you*. *Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ*, *he is not His*. (Romans 8:9)

*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you*? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you*, *whom you have from God*, *and you are not your own*? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

*And because you are sons*, *God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts*, *crying out*, “*Abba*, *Father*!” (Galatians 4:6)

*Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him*, *and He in him*. *And by this we know that He abides in us*, *by the Spirit whom He has given us*. (1 John 3:24)

*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks*, *whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit*.

(1 Corinthians 12:13)

*Who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee*.

(2 Corinthians 1:22)

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God*, *by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*. (Ephesians 4:30)

Spiritual gifts for Christian service: 1 Corinthians 12:11, 27-31; 13:1-2.

At the “new birth,” each believer is under the control (“filling” – influence) of the Holy Spirit – a control that may only be limited by the believer’s improper personal (willful) choice. By making wrong choices the believer allows sin to crowd out the influence of God’s Spirit in his life, even though God’s Spirit will never depart from the believer.

It is God’s will that each believer be always “filled” with (controlled, influenced by) the Holy Spirit in order to be divinely empowered for service. For this reason, once sin enters a believer’s life and thereby quenches (restricts) and grieves (causes hurt or emotional pain in) the Holy Spirit; it is up to the believer to enact 1 John 1:9, which if judiciously followed, will immediately reestablish the “filling” of the Holy Spirit in his life – a fact of faith, not feeling (emotion).

*And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation*; *but be filled* [controlled or influenced] *with the Spirit*. (Ephesians 5:18)

*Do not quench* [restricts the influence of] *the Spirit*. (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

*And do not grieve* [cause emotional pain in] *the Holy Spirit of God*, *by whom you were sealed for* [unto] *the day of redemption*. (Ephesians 4:30)

*If we confess* [name or take accountability for] *our* [known] *sins*, *He is faithful and just to forgive us our* [known] *sins and to cleanse us from all* [unknown or forgotten] *unrighteousness* [sins]. (John 1:9)

The “filling” (empowerment) by the Holy Spirit is not to be “prayed for” or “begged from God.” One doesn’t receive it by agonizing over the matter. It wasn’t because the disciples were praying that the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2; it was because the Holy Spirit was predestined to come in order to start the Church Age and they were “waiting” as instructed (Acts 1:4) in faith *(i.e.*, they believed God’s Word) for Him. At this time during the Church (Grace) Age (Dispensation), the Holy Spirit is more eager to “fill” (control) the believer than the believer is eager to have His control.

But be sure that a Christian may not be filled by the Holy Spirit without allowing the Word of Christ to “*dwell in you richly in all wisdom*” as is clearly seen when the following two passages of Scripture are correctly compared:

*And do not be drunk with wine*, *in which is dissipation*; *but be filled with the Spirit*, *speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, *singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*, *giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*. (Ephesians 5:18-20)

*Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom*, *teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, *singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord*. (Colossians 3:16)

Christians must know that nothing done apart from the Holy Spirit will honor God.

*That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*. (Romans 8:4)

**Evidence of Soul (Experiential) Sanctification**

One sure way a person may feel confident that the Holy Spirit is in control of his life will be if his primary focus is on Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It will be a focus that will always recognize the fact that Christ is truly God, and Christ will dominate his thoughts, his life, his praise, his gratitude, his testimony and his service.

It is unfortunate that many charismatic believers spend so much time in emotional displays and activities that primarily draw attention to themselves instead of their Lord and Savior. They apparently sincerely believe that they are only following the pattern that was apparent on the Day of Pentecost; but this writer sincerely believes they have misinterpreted this one-time event on that marvelous “day of demarcation” – the beginning of the Church Age.

And then there are the “faith healers” and “money grabbers” that travel the land and proliferate on “religious” television, who are quick to proclaim anything instead of faithfully conveying the gospel message of *faith alone in Christ alone* – the one healing message that Christ has commissioned all believers to share. They subjugate the clear presentation of the gospel message to their healing prowess and/or a “gospel” of “sowing seed,” choosing also to call attention to themselves and their multitude of commercial products and monetary gain.

Make no mistake about it. The Christian who is properly living by faith in accordance with the Word, in concert with the Holy Spirit, will always point others to Jesus Christ, and his life will be consumed with thanksgiving and praise for all the Son of God has and is doing in his life. He will not be majoring on “spiritual gifts,” and “healings” and other peripheral matters.

*But when the Helper comes, whom I* [Jesus Christ] *shall send to you from the Father*, *the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father*, *He will testify of Me.* (John 15:26)

*But of Him you are in Christ Jesus*, *who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption – that*, *as it is written*,” *He who glories*, *let him glory in the LORD*.” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31)

*But* “*he who glories*, *let him glory in the LORD*.” (2 Corinthians 10:17)

*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*. (1 Corinthians 2:2)

Sanctification, therefore, is God’s will for every one of our lives. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 again validates this: “*For this is the will of God*, *even your sanctification*.” The teachings surrounding the sanctification of the soul are the central subject of most of the epistles from Romans to Jude.

Sanctification is how our souls are transformed and saved: “*Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness*, *and receive with meekness the engrafted Word*, *which is able to save your souls*” (James 1:21). Spiritual growth to spiritual maturity can only come by the believer’s consumption of spiritual food, *i.e.*, the Word. Apart from this sanctification process, one may never properly understand the central message of the epistles (Hebrews 2:3; 10:35-39; 1 Peter 1:9). In other words, when God speaks of the “saving of souls,” it’s not the “new birth” to which He is referring. He is speaking about the cleansing, renewing and transforming of those who already believe.

God’s will is that we might make the constant “choice,” believing what He has to say about the matter, to let Him sanctify us. If we make this choice and do so in faith, He will make it happen in our lives. Furthermore, we must make 1 John 1:9 a major part of our lives: “*If we confess our sins*, *He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins*, *and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*.” Then God can constantly renew and transform us.

Following our new birth, God deals with us on an entirely different plane – as servants, with a view towards the kingdom. Sanctification is the highway to joint heirship with Christ during the coming Messianic Era.

[Bible One - Charles Strong's Sanctification, John 17:17](http://bibleone.net/Sanctification.htm)