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**Sanctification**

**Systematic Theology 602**

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The atoning work of Christ provides not just forgiveness of sins but justification and reconciliation to God, and then in turned credits us righteousness, which is done by God through Christ Jesus' life and death on the cross. Since God has accomplished this atoning work the Christian is free from the mastery of sin. For it is stated in Romans 6:14. "For sin shall not be your master because you are not under law. But under grace." And because of this work of God through Jesus Christ the Christian is then empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a life that is striving and working towards holiness. This is the process of sanctification, which happens over the course of one's life. However, I would not rule out that the process could happen a lot faster for one than another. Oden states, "It is rash to rule out the possibility that the Holy Spirit may flood the soul with sufficient grace that the trajectory of continued walking in the way of holiness is firmly set..." (Oden, *Life In The Spirit*, p. 223). Sanctification is becoming more Christ-like and it involves more than a mere moral reformation of character, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit bringing the whole nature more and more under the influences of Christ.

The life of Christ and His work on the cross was the atonement needed in order for us to attain salvation and redemption from our sins. Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) man has turned his back on God. God, who is holy, cannot tolerate or be in the presence of sin. Since man has sinned against God he has brought upon himself the condemnation and the due penalty of sin, which is death (Romans 6:23). However, God in Christ through His love substituted himself for sinners in order to make us one with God again as it was in the Garden of Eden. A new way of living began when Christ died and was raised from the dead. Now in Christ salvation can be attained. There is nothing we can bring, sacrifice, or perform but it is only faith in the life and work of Christ that brings us near God. Christ bore our sin and died our death to set us free from sin and to destroy the sting of death. Christ's death on the cross delivers man from sin and purifies our lives to uncover the image of God we were created in. Through the cross, Christ canceled the debt of sin that we all have because of our inheritance from Adam (Romans 5:19). The atonement of Christ also ransomed us. Payment was required for our sins and in Christ Jesus' death the ransom was paid and this liberated the believer from the mastery

of sin. This atonement brings us into a relationship with a new master who is God. For those who place their faith in Christ have become slaves of righteousness and the power of sin is defeated (Romans 6:14). "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:56-57). This is the beginning of the process of sanctification in a believer being made holy and set apart for God.

Now since the work of atonement is done through Christ so is the work of sanctification. However, I do not combine the two works into one simultaneous act that happens to the believer. I believe one first places their faith in Christ and receives the work of atonement and then starts the process of sanctification. Ladd mentions this view in contrast to his own saying, "Justification is the term designating the beginning of the Christian life, while sanctification designates development of that life through the internal work of the Spirit" (Ladd, p. 563). The Reformed and Lutheran model of sanctification did not agree with this position. The Lutheran model would allow some distinction between being justified and being sanctified but allows more a blurring of the two than distinction. Ladd agreed with the Reformed model in saying that justification, and sanctification are performed instantly when a person comes to Christ. Ladd says that, "Sanctification is not a synonym for moral growth" (Ladd, p. 563). Ladd also says, "...that all believers are viewed as sanctified in Christ... Paul addresses the Corinthians among whom existed scandalous sins not only as saints but as those sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:2)" (Ladd, p. 564). But this does not show that when one gives their life to Christ they are completely holy. Oden points out that the word saint, which is derived from the Latin word, *sanctus* is defined as "...set apart whom God's grace is making holy, who in heaven will share fully in God's holiness, and in whose life is already recognizable some fruits of a holy, charitable, merciful humble life (Ephesians 1:8, 3:8, 18)" (Oden, *Life In The Spirit*, p. 217). In 1 Corinthians 1:2 it says, "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-their Lord and ours." I would not view 1 Corinthians 1:2 and simply say, as Ladd states, that every believer is completely sanctified when

they place their faith in Christ. However, I would see this type of sanctification as a positional sanctification as Thiessen states in his book, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Thiessen, p. 289). “Of the Corinthians Paul explicitly says that they ‘were sanctified’ (I Corinthians 6:11), though he also declared that they were ‘still fleshly’ (I Corinthians 3:3). In 2 Corinthians he urged them to be ‘perfecting holiness in the fear of God’ (7:1)” (Thiessen, p. 289). This positional sanctification is a now a life that is hidden with Christ in God as stated in Colossians 3:3. God now see the believer as holy because of Christ’s work. Colossians 1:22 states this imputed work of Christ to the believer. “But now He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation.” The believer “stands before God, Christ-like (Romans 8:29; I Cor:30)” (Thiessen, p. 290). The work of positional sanctification is done by Christ’s work on the cross. The believer now stands in that grace as stated in Romans 5:2. I also read in Hebrews 2:11 stating, “Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.” God through Jesus Christ chooses to make the believer Holy in His sight. However, I believe that there remains a process of sanctification in their life on earth that a believer goes through after receiving the gift of justification by God through Jesus Christ. This need to first recognize a believer’s new position hidden in Christ as a “saint” is essential and then the process of sanctification is to be dealt with as the Christian lives out their life on this earth.

Once the believer places their faith in Christ I believe the Holy Spirit then comes and dwells in the believer. This is different from the Wesleyan Model of sanctification where John Wesley states that the believer after coming to Christ will experience a second encounter or “second work of grace,” which is seen as the Baptism in the Spirit taken from the account recorded in Acts 2. I disagree with this “second work of grace” that Wesley talks about, but agree with Oden’s view, “It is not as though one first believes and later the spirit comes to dwell. Rather, saving faith embraces the indwelling Spirit” (Oden, *Life in The Spirit*, p. 178). In Romans 5:5 it states, “...God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.” And in I Corinthians 6:19, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you,

whom you have received from God? You are not your own..." Also we see this in 2 Timothy 1:14, "Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you- guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." In addition the Holy Spirit is a mark and seal of the believer. "...Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13). This deposit of the Holy Spirit to the believer gives the ability to be sanctified.

In the process of sanctification the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life brings liberation from sin. In Romans 8:1-2 it says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." The Holy Spirit in a believer's life is a constant in the Christian life. It must be noted that the Holy Spirit is not something that comes out when needed but is always there in a believer's life. The Holy Spirit strengthens the faith of one as it says in Ephesians 3:16, "...strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being." Also, the Holy Spirit prepares the believer to do the work of God. Acts 1:8 states, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all the Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." It prepares for what God desires for the believer to accomplish and ultimately God desires for the believer to be completely set apart for His special purposes and use. The Spirit of God intercedes for the believer to help in our weakness. "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words can not express" (Romans 8:26). And other passages of scriptures, Jude 20, and Ephesians 6:18 talk about how the believer prays in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides the believer's prayers to God. When the Spirit's working in the life of a believer the fruit of the spirit will be produced as stated in Galatians 5:22-23. This is the Holy Spirit's goal in making the believer more Christ-like. It is a progressive work to transform the believer in living out the righteousness we gain through Christ Jesus. Showing who God is through our life is the Holy Spirit's work in the believer.

God desires to fill His children with His Holy Spirit so that He can work in them and through them. God created us in His image and likeness. We were created to be in complete relationship with

God. So God in his love is ready and willing to empower us with His Spirit to make us holy in order for us to be in relationship with Him. Andrew Murray stated in his book, *Absolute Surrender*, “God longs to give each one individually, separately, the power of the Holy Spirit for daily life. The command comes to us individually, unitedly. God wants us as His children to call on Him for mercy” (Murray, p. 99). It is living out life under the influence of the Holy Spirit and not under the influence of self. This is the process of sanctification working itself out in the believer in this life through the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul exclaimed through out his writings in the New Testament the concept of dying when one comes to faith in Christ. “When one comes to be in the Spirit, that person is delivered from the realm of the flesh. It is viewed as dead; it has been crucified” (Ladd, p.527). The Apostle Paul writes of this in Galatians 2:20 saying, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” This picture of being dead to self is also stated in Romans 12:1, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God...” “Believers are a ‘living sacrifice’ because they have died with Christ and will be raised with him (Romans 6:3-5)” (Thomas Schreiner, p. 252). This is again a positional statement of one’s life in Christ. Faith in Christ is the belief that you died, of course not physically that is why this is a positional statement, and Christ is wanting to live through and in you. This is where the sanctification process comes in as you allow Christ to guide you and conform you into His likeness.

The process of sanctification “is a progressive work; that it is begun in regeneration; and that it is carried on in the hearts of believers by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit...” (Oden, *Life In The Spirit*, p. 216). It is the continuing work of God in the life of the believer whereby the believer becomes more Christ-like. It is holiness that the believer is striving towards. Sanctification is being renewed into the image of God that one was created in. It is the process of dying to ways that lead to sin and conforming into the ways of Christ. Sanctification is a

process of reshaping one's life into holy living. This process is throughout one's life. I Corinthians 3:1-3 talks about how the new believer starts out on spiritual "milk" and then progresses to "solid food." Thomas Schreiner explains this process further in saying, " Even though believers have been converted, transformation or utter submission to God occurs as new ways of thinking are adopted. A process is involved in which believers discern the good, pleasing and perfect will of God" (Thomas Schreiner, p. 253). The believer does not immediately know what will please God but as the truth of God becomes more and more a part of their life they will be transformed so they can carry out the will of God. The Apostle Paul wrote, "...be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (Romans 12:2). God wants to change the way we think which will effect every part of our life. This is the progressive work that God does with the believer through the Holy Spirit.

I must note that through this process of sanctification the Christian will still struggle with sin. "For sin still remains or has remnants of vitality in the life of the believer even after receiving justifying grace" (Oden, *Life In The Spirit*, p.224). We see in Galatians 5:16-17 that there is warfare between the Spirit and the flesh even for the believer. "Even though believers have the Spirit, desires from the flesh still arise within them...they are treated as part of the warfare of Christian existence" (Thomas Schreiner, p. 266). I would further say that perfection or complete holiness is the goal but may not be attained in this life. Jesus did command the follower, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). However, in Philippians 3:12 & 15 the Apostle Paul goes back and forth about how he is living out his faith in Christ and what that is producing in his life. "Paul disclaims being already perfect in one breath and in the next claims to be perfect. It is evident that one is positional perfection and the other experiential perfection" (Thiessen, p.291). I do not view In Romans 7:13-23 that the Apostle Paul is talking about himself or the Christian life in general. Verses 14, 20, and 23 are talking about a person who is "sold as a slave to sin," there is "sin living" in this person, and this person is held "prisoner of the law of sin..." I believe strongly that what Paul had proclaimed in the previous chapter of Romans is that the believer is "set free from sin and have become slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:18). "The

regenerate man does not continue in sin, does not sin that grace may abound (Romans 6:1), has died to sin (6:2). The regenerate man is spiritual (Romans 6:4), but the man of Romans 7 is carnal..." (Oden, *Life In The Spirit*, p. 245). God does not condone sin in the life of the believer, but rather "He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Peter 1:15). The concept for the believer is to take "off the old self with its practices" and "put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Colossian 3:9-10). It is the process of being renewed that takes time. 1 John 1:7-10 states that the believer is not captive to sin, but it is noted that believer could struggle with sin and if the believer sins he has a remedy. God is ready and willing to forgive and cleanse when one confesses their sins to Him. The believer is called to walk in the light but 1 John makes it clear that there will be struggles with sin. In chapter two of 1 John it is written, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). The believer, though he struggles with sin, has an advocate that helps him on this process of holiness that he is called to.

Thomas Schreiner makes a point that "Believers have not yet obtained all that is in store for them because they are destined to die, and the mortality of the body indicates the continuing presence of sin" (Thomas Schreiner, p. 267). I do not take the mention of the "presence of sin" in a believer's life as one being held captive or enslaved to sin. I view this as what lingers from the old self but is going through the process of letting go of this master, sin, and embracing the new master who is God. I like the reminder Thomas Schreiner brings to the believer that our own mortality reminds us of this struggle with sin while being sanctified. The believer has been saved from the guilt and the penalty of sin. The process of sanctification in the believer is learning to rid oneself of sin, and in the end of the believer's life or when the Lord Jesus returns he will ultimately be saved from the very presence of sin. There is a debate over when this will happen. "Some reformed tradition have argued that death itself is a sanctifying transition for the elect, readying them for the holiness of God. Others argue, we should expect to be saved from all sin before the article of death" (Oden, *Life In The Spirit*, p. 241). It is understood that God commands

holiness for the believer but when that perfection actually happens is something we should not focus on. The focus should be on living for God and getting sin out of one's life and not thinking when I will attain perfection.

Believers in Christ Jesus are commanded to be imitators of God as stated in Ephesians 5:1 and live a holy life as stated in I Peter 1:15. I Thessalonians 4:3 states, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified," or set a part for God. It is this process of sanctification that every believer in Christ Jesus is working at. "There are two parties that have to do with man's sanctification: God and man" (Thiessen, p. 292). Man cannot start the process of sanctification without God first intervening in one's life through His Son, Jesus Christ's life. The believer can now see victory over sin where before he was held captive by sin. After this rebirth into a new creation in Christ man takes action, with the help of the Holy Spirit, into holy living. I Corinthians 7:1 states, "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates the body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." The Apostle Paul states in Philippians 2:12 that the believer must "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Thomas Schreiner states, "The addition of the word 'out' softens the verse unduly. The verse is better translated to say, 'Work your salvation with fear and trembling'" (Thomas Schreiner, p. 256). The Apostle Paul often emphasizes that salvation is not based on works but there is a command from God to work on holiness in living out your salvation. However, the words of Andrew Murray reminds the believer that one can not live day by day with out the power of the God in one's life. "I may consecrate myself a hundred times with all the intensity of my being, and that will not help me. What will help me is this-that God from heaven accepts and seals the consecration" (Murray, p. 100). The process of sanctification is a progressive work of God in the believer's life. The follower of Christ is motivated to work on living a holy life because of what God did through the sacrifice of His Son for our sins and the power of Holy Spirit in our lives.

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