

Study 0037

Scripture Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

In our last study, we studied the first of two levels of sanctification: sanctification by grace. We noted that sanctification by grace is essentially what God does in man through the finished work of Christ. In this study, we shall be looking at the other level of sanctification: sanctification by works. May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace to study, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Sanctification By Works

When we speak of works, we are not speaking about human effort without the help of the Holy Spirit; otherwise, it would be dead works. Works is what we do as the redeemed of the Lord in response to God's grace and mercy in our lives by doing the things He (God) wants us to do. Therefore, sanctification by works is that part of sanctification which involves man's response to God by way of obedience; which then produces the holiness of God in the man. Without obedience, there can be no holiness! Thus, obedience and holiness are synonymous—a holy man is an obedient man! A sanctified person is someone who is completely obedient to every word of God (**Deuteronomy 8:3**) and whose delight is to do the will of God (**Psalms 1:1-2; 40:8; Hebrews 10:7**). As faith is required for salvation, so is obedience required for sanctification. The good news is that by reason of the initial sanctification through the finished work of Christ in the believer, the Holy Spirit Who is now within the believer is also available to help him respond positively to God's every word.

Sanctification by works is thus, the process of transforming a newly born again believer, into the image of the Son of God, Jesus Christ (**2 Corinthians 3:13-18**), and involves the believer's positive response to God and to God's word. When we talk of the "image of the Son of God", we mean living as Christ lived here on earth in holiness and doing the will of the Father at all times (**John 6:38**). In **1 Peter 1:14-16**, the bible tells the believer in Christ not to slip back into his old ways of life or his ways of doing things according to his former desires, but to be holy as God is holy. This clearly places a responsibility on the believer to live in holiness, which is sanctification. Our scripture text tells us that we are made holy through the agency of the Holy Spirit, and faith in the word of God. It also emphasizes our responsibility as believers in Christ in sanctification, by asking us to stand fast therefore and follow the teachings of the truth (the word of God) which we receive through sermons, bible studies, recorded messages, and so on. Thus demonstrating the believer's active role in sanctification.

Being made holy and getting rid of sin is the work of grace; whereas, living a holy life and being separated from sinful living is the responsibility of the believer in Christ. In sanctification by works, the believer in Christ must cooperate with two divine agents of sanctification—the Holy Spirit and the word of God (**1 Peter 1:2; John 17:17**). The believer must yield to the leading and dealings of the Holy Spirit within him (**Galatians 5:16**); and he must respond in faith and obedience to the word of God (**Matthew 13:19-23; James 1:22-25; John 8:31-32**). Also, through the Holy Spirit within the believer in Christ; and the believer's faith in, and obedience to, the word of God, he is able to avoid the things that can defile him and thus he can stay sanctified (**Proverbs 25:4-5; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17**). The believer in Christ is thus able to live a holy or sanctified life (**Romans 8:14**).

Sanctification is not a once-and-for-all matter; rather, it is a continuous work involving the believer in Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, the action of the word of God in the believer (**Hebrews 4:12**), and the fervent, effectual prayer of the believer (**1 Timothy 4:5; James 5:16b**). Indeed, if we are to remain sanctified after the initial sanctification by grace, we must continually yield completely to the Holy Spirit's leading (**Galatians 5:16-18**), absolutely trust the word of God (**Proverbs 3:5-6**), and have a vibrant and effectual prayer life (**1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18; Luke 18:1**). We must also see sin for what it is—evil; and must dissociate from sinful living in a very active sense by avoiding people and activities that lead to sin (**Proverbs 4:14-19; 8:13; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 1:9**). It is important to note that unless the initial sanctification by grace takes place, the believer's efforts or attempts to be holy will fail and he will be frustrated because we will be doing things in his strength (**Matthew 12:33; Romans 7:14-25**).

Conclusion

Our continuous sanctification through our cooperation with the Holy Spirit and adherence to the word of God, makes us able to serve God (**Romans 12:1**); become like Christ (**Malachi 3:3; 2 Corinthians 3:18**), and guarantees our eternal salvation (**2 Peter 1:3-11**). When dirty clothes are brought into a laundry, the first thing that happens after the sorting and other formalities is the washing of the dirty clothes. But even though the clothes are clean, they can still not be considered as having gone to the laundry. This is because the clothes have not been ironed or pressed. It is the ironing that makes the clothes usable and considered to have been taken to the laundry. This is much the same thing that happens when we come to God in faith through Christ. We are cleansed and set apart by the blood of Jesus (**Hebrews 9:14**); but are unusable to God. It is sanctification, as illustrated by the pressing of the washed clothes that makes us usable to God (**2 Timothy 2:20-21**), and presentable as the people of God, who are truly and genuinely born again (**Ephesians 5:25-27**)!

Having been made holy therefore, we must walk circumspectly to maintain that holiness by our actions (**Ephesians 5:1-15**). This, we shall consider in the next study.

EXERCISE

Please answer true or false to the statements below.

1. Sanctification is a combination of grace and works.
2. Sanctification by works is the effort of man to be holy with or without the Holy Spirit.
3. The word of God is a divine agent of sanctification.
4. The Spirit of God is also a divine agent of sanctification.
5. Sanctification is a once-and-for-all action of God in the life of a believer in Christ.
6. Once the word of God is preached to a person, he becomes sanctified.
7. If the Holy Spirit asks you to do something, that is sanctification.
8. When a believer in Christ tries very hard to obey God he is sanctified, whether or not he is actually able to; for sanctification is about his attempt to obey, not necessarily the act of obedience.
9. Sanctification is a continuous action which ensures that the believer stays sanctified, and is able to enter into eternal life.
10. Sanctification by works does not include any form of grace whatsoever; it is all about the believer's actions.
11. Whether or not a person is born again is irrelevant; what is important is that the person is sanctified.
12. Sanctification is what happens when our faith grows and blossoms into our love for all men.

13. The sanctified believer looks and does like Christ in everything.
14. Sanctification, holiness, and obedience to God are all the same thing.
15. A believer who argues with the word of God is unsanctified.
16. A person who is born again but not sanctified cannot be admitted into heaven.
17. Prayer is needed for asking things from God, and has nothing to do with sanctification.
18. A believer who is born again can serve God acceptably whether or not he is sanctified.
19. It is one thing to be made holy; it is another thing to live holy.
20. Sanctification leads to delighting to do the will of God whether or not that will is acceptable to the flesh.