

## **Sanctification by Sinclair Ferguson, J I Packer, Robert Brinsmead**

### **Sinclair Ferguson**

from *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*

Union with Christ in his death and resurrection is the element of union which Paul most extensively expounds...if we are united to Christ, then we are united to him at all points of his activity on our behalf. We share in his death (we were baptized into his death), in his resurrection (we are resurrected with Christ), in his ascension (we have been raised with him), in his heavenly session (we sit with him in heavenly places, so that our life is hidden with Christ in God), and we will share in his promised return (when Christ, who is our life, appears, we also will appear with him in glory) (Rom. 6:14; Col. 2:11-12; 3:1-3).

This, then, is the foundation of sanctification in Reformed theology. It is rooted, not in humanity and their achievement of holiness or sanctification, but in what God has done in Christ, and for us in union with him. Rather than view Christians first and foremost in the microcosmic context of their own progress, the Reformed doctrine first of all sets them in the macrocosm of God's activity in redemptive history. It is seeing oneself in this context that enables the individual Christian to grow in true holiness.

### **Sanctification - *The Christian Grows in Grace***

J.I. Packer (from [\*Concise Theology\*](#))

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?...And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9, 11).

Sanctification, says the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q.35), 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." The concept is not of sin being totally eradicated (that is to claim too much) or merely counteracted (that is to say too little), but of a divinely wrought character change freeing us from sinful habits and forming in us Christlike affections, dispositions, and virtues.

Sanctification is an ongoing transformation within a maintained consecration, and it engenders real righteousness within the frame of relational holiness. Relational sanctification, the state of being permanently set apart for God, flows from the cross, where God through Christ purchased and claimed us for himself (Acts 20:28; 26:18; Heb. 10:10).

Moral renovation, whereby we are increasingly changed from what we once were, flows from the agency of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13; 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:11, 19-20; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:22-24; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 13:20-21). God calls his children to sanctity and graciously gives what he commands (1 Thess. 4:4; 5:23).

Regeneration is birth; sanctification is growth. In regeneration, God implants desires that were not there before: desire for God, for holiness, and for the hallowing and glorifying of God's name in this world; desire to pray, worship, love, serve, honor, and please God; desire to show love and bring benefit to others. In sanctification, the Holy Spirit "works in you to will and to act" according to God's purpose; what he does is prompt you to "work out your salvation" (i.e., express it in action) by fulfilling these new desires (Phil. 2:12-13). Christians become increasingly Christlike as the moral profile of Jesus (the "fruit of the Spirit") is progressively formed in them (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:19; 5:22-25). Paul's use of glory in 2 Corinthians 3:18 shows that for him sanctification of character is glorification begun. Then the physical transformation that gives us a body like Christ's, one that will match our totally transformed character and be a perfect means of expressing it, will be glorification completed (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:49-53).

Regeneration was a momentary monergistic act of quickening the spiritually dead. As such, it was God's work alone. Sanctification, however, is in one sense synergistic - it is an ongoing cooperative process in which regenerate persons, alive to God and freed from sin's dominion (Rom. 6:11, 14-18), are required to exert themselves in sustained obedience. God's method of sanctification is neither activism (self-reliant activity) nor apathy (God-reliant passivity), but God-dependent effort (2 Cor. 7:1; Phil. 3:10-14; Heb. 12:14). Knowing that without Christ's enabling we can do nothing, morally speaking, as we should, and that he is ready to strengthen us for all that we have to do (Phil. 4:13), we "stay put" (remain, abide) in Christ, asking for his help constantly - and we receive it (Col. 1:11; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 1:7; 2:1).

The standard to which God's work of sanctifying his saints is directed is his own revealed moral law, as expounded and modeled by Christ himself. Christ's love, humility, and patience under pressure are to be consciously imitated (Eph. 5:2; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Pet. 2:21), for a Christlike spirit and attitude are part of what law-keeping involves. Believers find within themselves contrary urgings. The Spirit sustains their regenerate desires and purposes; their fallen, Adamic instincts (the "flesh") which, though dethroned, are not yet destroyed, constantly distract them

from doing God's will and allure them along paths that lead to death (Gal. 5:16-17; James 1:14-15). To clarify the relationship between the law and sin, Paul analyzes in a personal and dramatic way the sense of impotence for complete law-keeping, and the enslavement to behavior one dislikes, that the Spirit-flesh tension produces (Rom. 7:14-25). This conflict and frustration will be with Christians as long as they are in the body. Yet by watching and praying against temptation, and cultivating opposite virtues, they may through the Spirit's help "mortify" (i.e., drain the life out of, weaken as a means of killing) particular bad habits, and in that sense more and more die unto sin (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5). They will experience many particular deliverances and victories in their unending battle with sin, while never being exposed to temptations that are impossible to resist (1 Cor. 10:13).

### **The role of Justification in Sanctification from Robert Brinsmead:**

"It can be seen that Luther did not think that the doctrine of imputed righteousness was only something to be preached to mere Christian beginners or that it could be forgotten as a mastered accomplishment. He not only stressed that this truth cannot be learned too well but that it must occupy the central position in the teaching and thinking of the church.... Not by any stretch of the imagination is Christ's imputed righteousness central in present-day thinking or witness. Some will make cursory mention of it, and even most who do mention it relegate it to something which is required at the time of Christian initiation. Apparently it is thought that more mature Christians can get past it and go on to higher things... Most evangelical witness tends to lack a central theology of justification. Its overwhelming focus is on the internal experience of being born again and saved. There is much truth in it. The need for the new birth ought to be taught. But when it is not seen in the setting of the pre-eminence of justification by an imputed righteousness, there is grave danger that people come to think that salvation is based on an internal change within their own hearts. Then the focus is inward instead of outward, on Christian experience instead of Christ's experience, on a subjective happening instead of a historical reality... In the popular evangelical message, people are urged to get saved by inviting Christ to come into their hearts. Being saved is then identified with having that internal experience of being born again by the presence of the indwelling Christ... The apostles did not begin by proclaiming that their hearers could be saved by having Christ come into

their hearts to produce an internal experience. Their focus was not an internal happening but an external happening. Christ lived, died and rose again for the sinner's justification. The apostles proclaimed an objective, historical reality. Here was Paul's *kerygma*:

"We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again. . . Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Acts 13:32, 33, 38, 39.

Salvation was said to be in something which God had already done outside the sinner in the person of Jesus Christ. As men listened, the Holy Spirit was present to give them faith. Now the hearers were exhorted to accept this salvation by faith. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Rom. 10:9... Faith does not bring the person of Christ down out of heaven to come into the believer's heart,<sup>2</sup> for "the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above)" (Rom. 10:6). Rather, faith lifts the believer up to heaven and places him "in Christ." Then and then alone is the scripture fulfilled, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Cor. 5:17... Rather than the new birth being the result of focusing on the inner change itself, the very opposite is true. We see this illustrated in Jesus' lesson to Nicodemus. After telling the proud ruler about his need of a new birth, Jesus did not lead the convicted sinner to dwell on his internal experience. He directed Nicodemus' eyes to that great external event which guaranteed his salvation. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:14,15... Sanctification has often been separated from justification. When the renewing power of the Holy Spirit is separated from the doctrine of justification, all that is left is a cold, legal, intellectualized concept. Then there is only a fictitious "justification" which brings neither the Holy Ghost nor His transforming power into the life of the church. People profess salvation while their lives are a positive denial of it.

Then what happens? The preacher looks at the church and thinks, "These people have been 'saved,' but they certainly need something else to lift them out of their low spiritual [carnal?] state." Along comes a "second

blessing" or "renewal" expert who proceeds to say, "What these people need now is to learn the secret of the deeper life. They have been taught justification [?], but now they need to be taught the secret of sanctification."

This program is quite palatable to proud human hearts—especially to responsible people in the church who are supposed to have been "saved" for years. It would be altogether too humbling to admit that what is needed is a true, Bible experience of accepting the gospel, being justified by faith and being truly born again in consequence of it. It is too hard to confess being among those **thieves and robbers** who have really tried to climb over the wall rather than to get into the fold by the one true door (John 10:1). So instead of submitting to going back and entering the real door of salvation, men think it much better to get a second blessing, some baptism of power that will correct their carnal condition. Being outside of Christ, they expose themselves to a false spirit and delude themselves that they are filled with the Holy Spirit because they can do fantastic things like speak in an unknown tongue—unknown to God as well as to man.

Certainly justification must be distinguished from sanctification.<sup>3</sup> We must not transfer the property of one benefit to the other. But it is just as certain that they can never be separated. Union with Christ by saving faith results in justification as a judicial benefit, but it also results in sanctification as a moral benefit. One blessing cannot be enjoyed without the other. They are as related as light and heat. Where there is light, there will be heat. Sanctification of the Spirit through a life of active obedience, is not optional. God does not justify the sinner in such a way that obedience to the Ten Commandments is optional. Submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is not optional. Faith that is unto justification means that the whole life turns from disobedience and submits to the sanctifying authority of Heaven's government. It is impossible to be justified and not have the renewing, transforming gift of the Holy Spirit... Justification means that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer and that he stands before God as if he were perfect. God must, therefore, treat him as a righteous man; and He does this by giving the believer the gift and infilling of the Spirit. What is needed, therefore, is not a "second blessing" doctrine to add to justification but a true justification which will bring every blessing in its train.