

Q35. What is sanctification?

A35. **Sanctification 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.**

Scripture References: 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 4:23-24; Romans 6:4, 6, 14, 8:4; 1 Peter 1:2

DQ1: Whose work is sanctification?

DQ2: What does sanctification accomplish?

DQ3: Which part of man is being sanctified?

DQ4: What is the goal of sanctification?

DQ5: Is sanctification an event or a process? Please describe it.

DQ6: What is the role of man in sanctification?

Notes:

Sanctification, like justification and adoption, is also wholly the work of God and is wholly unmerited by man. We often have an idea that sanctification depends upon the work and effort of man but it is not the case. Man has no ability to sanctify himself under any circumstances. Every step of sanctification is the work of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. However, this introductory statement may very well have surprised you. We will be discussing this very interesting aspect of sanctification later in our discussion.

Sanctification, among other things, accomplishes the work of renewing the whole person after the image of God. What does that mean? It is by sanctification that man is fully transformed internally and externally. Internal change is called "regeneration." (Col. 3:9-10) Internal changes begin to bring about significant tension with the external. This is because a regenerated man cannot live peacefully with his sinful flesh. (1 John 3:6-9) Therefore, sanctification affects the whole person. Spiritual growth means not just the way in which we think but also the way in which we live. Sanctification allows man's outside is consistent with his inside and vice versa. Such consistency is an important indicator of sanctification. A proof of one's sanctification is when sin is not acceptable even though he is not without sin.

The goal of sanctification is not good behavior. Rather, sanctification leads one to display more and more of God's image, i.e., take on more and more of God's communicable attributes and characteristics. Sanctification leads to a full recovery of the original image of God first found in Adam and Eve before their fall. But, this time, when sanctification is complete, man will not be subject to corruption or to temptations.

Sanctification, unlike justification and adoption, is a process, not an event. This is a major difference. Let's look more differences as explained by Wayne A. Grudem below.

Justification

Legal Status
Occurs at once
Totally of God
Completed on earth
All believers equally

Sanctification

Internal Transformation
A life-long process
Totally of God but with man*
Only upon death
All believers differently

*At this point, it is important to touch upon this issue of the role of God and man. What we must remember is that the entire process of redemption is completely the work of God. Redemption is wholly and unilaterally the work of God alone. No one is ever saved by any efforts made by him. Therefore, sanctification is also the work of God. There is nothing that would change this. Even our faith is a gift of God. (Eph. 2:8) But, it is this faith allows us to participate in the work of God, particularly the work of God in our sanctification. Therefore, we participate in God's work. (Phil. 1:12-13) So, it is in this sense that sanctification requires our participation. (1 Thes. 2:13, 4:3, 5:23; Hebrews 12:2, 4-11, 13:20-21; Phil. 2:3, 12-13; 1 Cor. 1:30, 6:18; 1 Peter 1:2, 2:21; 1 John 2:6, 3:3; Gal. 5:22-23, Rom. 8:13-14, 12:1)

Two additional thoughts should contribute to our understanding of sanctification.

First, as a sinner is justified and adopted, Christ indwells in him and, by his help, work and ministry, he begins to experience the internal transformation, which translates into concrete noticeable external changes. Such externally expressed changes are the life of being the light and salt of the earth. Further, this is how we grow to the full measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)

Second, sanctification means that God has already separated us from the world and called us unto himself. Without a separation from the world by way of calling, sanctification is not possible. While we live in the world, we do not belong to the world. (John 15:19, 17:14) Sanctification causes us to follow God's laws, not the man's laws. (Rom. 8:5) We live as pilgrims and fulfilled the desire of God in the process. This is sanctification.

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1. They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection,[a] by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them,[b] the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed,[c] and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified;[d] and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces,[e] to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.[f]

[a]. I Thess. 5:23-24; II Thess. 2:13-14; Ezek. 36:22-28; Titus 3:5; Acts 20:32; Phil. 3:10; Rom. 6:5-6

[b]. John 17:17, 19; Eph. 5:26; Rom. 8:13-14; II Thess. 2:13

[c]. Rom. 6:6, 14

[d]. Gal. 5:24; Rom. 8:13

[e]. Col. 1:10-11; Eph. 3:16-19

[f]. II Cor. 7:1; Col. 1:28; Col. 4:12; Heb. 12:14

2. This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man;[g] yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part;[h] whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.[i]

[g]. I Thess. 5:23; Rom. 12:1-2

[h]. I John 1:8-10; Rom. 7:14-25; Phil. 3:12

[i]. Gal. 5:17

3. In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail;[k] yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome;[l] and so, the saints grow in grace,[m] perfecting holiness in the fear of God.[n]

[k]. Rom. 7:23

[l]. Rom. 6:14; I John 5:4; Eph. 4:15-16; see Rom. 8:2

[m]. II Pet. 3:18; II Cor. 3:18

[n]. II Cor. 7:1
