

Sanctification (Part 1)

by J.C. Ryle

Sanctification is the invariable result of vital union with Christ and the outcome and inseparable consequence of regeneration, and it is essential for living a holy life and preparing for heaven.

Scripture: John 17:17, Romans 8:9, Galatians 5:22, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Hebrews 13:16

Topics: "Holiness", "Sanctification"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the critical importance of sanctification in the life of a believer, asserting that it is essential for salvation and a clear indicator of one's relationship with Christ. He outlines twelve propositions that define sanctification, including its connection to true faith, regeneration, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Ryle stresses that sanctification is not only a responsibility of every believer but also a process that requires diligent use of Scriptural means and is marked by growth and struggle. He concludes that sanctification is necessary for a genuine witness of faith and preparation for heaven, where holiness is essential. Ryle urges readers to reflect deeply on these truths.

Transcript

"Sanctify them through Thy truth."

John 17:17

"This is the will of God, even your sanctification."

I Thess. 4:3

Sanctification is a subject of the utmost importance to our souls. If the Bible be true, it is certain that unless we are "sanctified," we shall not be saved. In the first place, let us consider the nature of sanctification. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of a "sanctified" man? I shall lay before my readers a series of connected propositions or statements, drawn from Scripture, which I think will be found useful in defining the exact nature of sanctification.

1. It is the invariable result of that vital union with Christ which true faith gives to a Christian. "He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit." The branch that bears no fruit is no living branch of the vine. The union with Christ that produces no effect on heart and life is a mere formal union, worthless before God.

2. It is the outcome and inseparable consequence of regeneration. He that is born again and made a new creature receives a new nature and a new principle; he always lives a new life. In a word, where there is no holy life, there is no new birth.

3. It is the only certain evidence of that indwelling of the Holy Spirit which is essential to salvation. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." The Spirit never lies dormant and idle within the soul. He always makes his presence known by the fruit he causes to be borne in heart, character, and life. We may depend on it as a positive certainty, that where there is no holy living, there is no Holy Ghost.

4. It is the only sure mark of God's election. It is not given to us to study the pages of the Book of Life and see if our names are there. But if there is one thing clearly and plainly laid down about election, it is this: Elect men and women may be known and distinguished by holy lives. He that boasts of being one of God's elect while willfully and habitually living in sin is only deceiving himself.

5. It will always be seen. A truly sanctified person may be so clothed with humility that he can see in himself nothing but infirmity and defects. But others will always see in him a tone, taste, character, and habit of life unlike that of other men. The very idea of a man being "sanctified" while no holiness can be seen in his life is flat nonsense.

6. It is a thing for which every believer is responsible. Believers are eminently and peculiarly responsible and under a special obligation to live holy lives. They are not as others--dead, blind, and unrenewed. They are alive unto God and have light, knowledge, and a new principle within them. Whose fault is it if they are not holy, but their own? God, who has given them grace, a new heart, and a new nature, has deprived them of all excuse if they do not live for his praise. This is a point which is far too often forgotten.

7. It admits of growth and degrees. A man may climb from one step to another in holiness and be far more sanctified at one period of his life than another. If there is any point on which God's holiest saints agree, it is this: That they see more, know more, feel more, do more, repent more, and believe more as they get on in spiritual life and in proportion to the closeness of their walk with God.

8. It depends greatly on a diligent use of Scriptural means. I have in view Bible reading, private prayer, regular attendance at public worship, regular hearing of God's Word, and regular reception of the Lord's Supper. No one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification. I can find no record of any eminent saint who ever neglected them. Our God is a God who works by means, and he will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them.

9. It does not prevent man from having a great deal of inward spiritual conflict. By conflict I mean struggle within the heart between the old nature and the new, which are to be found together in every believer. A deep sense of that struggle and a vast amount of mental discomfort from it are no proof that a man is not sanctified. Rather, I believe they are healthy symptoms of our condition and prove that we are not dead, but alive. A true Christian is one who has not only peace of conscience, but war within. The heart of the best Christian, even at his best, is a field occupied by two rival camps.

10. It cannot justify a man, yet it pleases God. The holiest actions of the holiest saint that ever lived are all, more or less, full of defects and imperfections. To suppose that such actions can stand the severity of God's judgment, atone for sin, and merit heaven is simply absurd. For all this, however, the Bible distinctly teaches that the holy actions of a sanctified man, although imperfect, are pleasing in the sight of God.

"With such sacrifices God is well pleased." (Heb. 13:16)

11. It will be found absolutely necessary as a witness to our character in the great day of judgment. It will be utterly useless to plead that we believed in Christ unless our faith has had some sanctifying effect and been seen in our lives. Evidence will be the one thing wanted when the great white throne is set, when the books are opened, when the graves give up their tenants, when the dead are arraigned before the bar of God. Without some evidence that our faith in Christ was real and genuine, we shall only rise again to be condemned. He that supposes works are of no importance, because they cannot justify us, is a very ignorant Christian.

12. Lastly, sanctification is absolutely necessary in order to train and prepare us for heaven. Heaven is essentially a holy place; its inhabitants are all holy, its occupations are all holy. To be really happy in heaven, it is clear and plain that we must be somewhat trained and made ready while we are on earth. We must be saints before we die if we are to be saints afterward in glory. What could an unsanctified man do in heaven, if by any chance he got there? No man can possibly be happy in a place where he is not in his element, and where all around him is not congenial to his tastes, habits, and character.

I lay down these twelve propositions about sanctification with a firm persuasion that they are true, and I ask all who read these pages to ponder them well.

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