

Sanctification

by J.C. Ryle

Sanctification is the inward spiritual work of Christ by the Holy Spirit, which separates a person from sin and the world, puts a new principle in the heart, and makes one practically godly in life.

Scripture: Matthew 11:30, John 17:17, Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Hebrews 12:14, 2 Peter 3:18, 1 John 3:9

Topics: "Holiness", "Sanctification"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the critical importance of sanctification in the Christian life, arguing that it is essential for salvation alongside justification and regeneration. He addresses common misconceptions about sanctification, clarifying that it is an inward work of the Holy Spirit that transforms believers, making them more like Christ. Ryle warns against the dangers of confusing sanctification with mere outward religious practices or temporary emotions, urging Christians to pursue genuine holiness as evidence of their faith. He highlights that true sanctification is marked by a life of obedience, love, and a continual reliance on Christ for growth in holiness. Ultimately, Ryle asserts that sanctification is not only necessary for salvation but also essential for enjoying the fullness of life in Christ and preparing for heaven.

Transcript

SANCTIFICATION

"Sanctify them through Your truth." (John 17:17).

"This is the will of God, even your sanctification." (1 Thess. 4:3).

The subject of sanctification is one which many, I fear, dislike exceedingly. Some even turn from it with scorn and disdain. The very last thing they would like is to be a "saint" or a "sanctified" man. Yet the subject does not deserve to be treated in this way. It is not an enemy, but a friend.

It is a subject of the utmost importance to our souls. If the Bible is true, it is certain that unless we are "sanctified," we shall not be saved. There are three things which, according to the Bible, are absolutely necessary to the salvation of every man and woman in Christendom. These three are justification, regeneration and sanctification. All three meet in every child of God: he is both born again and justified and sanctified. He who lacks any one of these three things is not a true Christian in the sight of God and, dying in that condition, will not be found in heaven and glorified in the last day.

It is a subject which is peculiarly seasonable in the present day. Strange doctrines have risen up of late upon the whole subject of sanctification. Some appear to confound it with justification. Others fritter it away to nothing, under the presence of zeal for free grace, and practically neglect it altogether. Others are so much afraid of "works" being made a part of justification that they can hardly find any place at all for "works" in their religion. Others set up a wrong standard of sanctification before their eyes and, failing to attain it, waste their lives in repeated secessions from church to church, chapel to chapel and sect to sect, in the vain hope that they will find what they want. In a day like this, a calm examination of the subject, as a great leading doctrine of the gospel, may be of great use to our souls.

Now let us consider the true nature of sanctification, its visible marks, and how it is compared to and contrasted with justification.

If, unhappily, the reader is one of those who cares for nothing but this world, and makes no profession of religion, I cannot expect him to take much interest in what I am writing. You will probably think it an affair of "words and names" and nice questions, about which it matters nothing what you hold and believe. But if you are a thoughtful, reasonable, sensible Christian, I venture to say that you will find it worthwhile to have some clear ideas about sanctification.

1. The nature of sanctification

Sanctification is that inward spiritual work which the Lord Jesus Christ works in a man by the Holy Spirit, when He calls him to be a true believer. He not only washes him from his sins in His own blood, but He also separates him from his natural love of sin and the world, puts a new principle in his heart and makes him practically godly in life. The instrument by which the Spirit effects this work is generally the Word of God, though He sometimes uses afflictions and providential visitations "without the Word" (1 Peter 3:1). The subject of this work of Christ by His Spirit is called in Scripture a "sanctified" man. *

He who supposes that Jesus Christ only lived and died and rose again in order to provide justification and forgiveness of sins for His people has yet much to learn. Whether he knows it or not, he is dishonoring our blessed Lord and making Him only a half Savior. The Lord Jesus has undertaken everything that His people's souls require: not only to deliver them from the guilt of their sins by His atoning death, but from the dominion of their sins, by placing in their hearts the Holy Spirit; not only to justify them, but also to sanctify them. He is, thus, not only their "righteousness," but their "sanctification" (1 Cor. 1:30). Let us hear what the Bible says: "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified." "Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it." "Christ . . . gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." "Christ . . . bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." Christ "has . . . reconciled [you] in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight" (John 17:19; Eph. 5:25, 26; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24; Col. 1:22). Let the meaning of these five texts be carefully considered. If words mean anything, they teach that Christ undertakes the sanctification, no less than the justification, of His believing people. Both are alike provided for in that "everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure," of which the Mediator is Christ. In fact, Christ in one place is called "He who sanctifies," and His people "they who are sanctified" (Heb. 2:11).

The subject before us is of such deep and vast importance that it requires fencing, guarding, clearing up and marking out on every side. A doctrine which is needful to salvation can never be too sharply

developed or brought too fully into light. To clear away the confusion between doctrines and doctrines, which is so unhappily common among Christians, and to map out the precise relation between truths and truths in religion is one way to attain accuracy in our theology. I shall therefore not hesitate to 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. Each proposition would admit of being expanded and handled more fully, and all of them deserve private thought and consideration. Some of them may be disputed and contradicted; but I doubt whether any of them can be overthrown or proved untrue. I only ask for them a fair and impartial hearing.

1. Sanctification 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" (John 15:5). The branch which bears no fruit is no living branch of the vine. The union with Christ which produces no effect on heart and life is a mere formal union, which is worthless before God. The faith which has not a sanctifying influence on the character is no better than the faith of devils. It is a "dead faith, because it is alone." It is not the gift of God. It is not the faith of God's elect. In short, where there is no sanctification of life, there is no real faith in Christ. True faith works by love. It constrains a man to live unto the Lord from a deep sense of gratitude for redemption. It makes him feel that he can never do too much for Him that died for him. Being much forgiven, he loves much. He whom the blood cleanses walks in the light. He who has real lively hope in Christ purifies himself even as He is pure (James 2:17-20; Titus 1:1; Gal. 5:6; 1 John 1:7; 3:3).

2. Sanctification is the outcome and inseparable consequence of regeneration. He who is born again and made a new creature receives a new nature and a new principle and always lives a new life. A regeneration, which a man can have and yet live carelessly in sin or worldliness, is a regeneration invented by uninspired theologians, but never mentioned in Scripture. On the contrary, St. John expressly says that "He who is born of God does not commit sin," "does righteousness," "loves the brethren," "keeps himself" and "overcomes the world" (1 John 2:29; 3:9-14; 5:4-18). Simply put, the lack of sanctification is a sign of non-regeneration. Where there is no holy life, there has been no holy birth. This is a hard saying, but a Biblical truth; whomever is born of God, it is written, "cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9).

3. Sanctification 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" (Rom. 8:9). 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. "The fruit of the Spirit," says St. Paul, "is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" and such like (Gal. 5:22). Where these things are to be found, there is the Spirit; where these things are wanting, men are dead before God. The Spirit is compared to the wind; and, like the wind, He cannot be seen by our bodily eyes. But, just as we know there is a wind by the effect it produces on waves and trees and smoke, so we may know the Spirit is in a man by the effects He produces in the man's conduct. It is nonsense to suppose that we have the Spirit if we do not also "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). We may depend on it as a positive certainty that, where there is no holy living, there is no Holy Spirit. The seal that the Spirit stamps on Christ's people is sanctification. As many as are actually "led by the Spirit of God, they," and they only, "are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

4. Sanctification is the only sure mark of God's election. The names and number of the elect are a secret thing, no doubt, which God has wisely kept in His own power and not revealed to man. It is not given to us in this world 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--that elect men and women may be known and distinguished by holy lives. It is expressly written that they are "elect through sanctification," "chosen to salvation through sanctification," "predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's Son," and "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world that they should be holy." Hence, when St. Paul saw the working "faith" and laboring "love" and patient "hope" of the Thessalonian believers, he said, "I know your election of God" (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4; 1 Thess. 1:3, 4). He who boasts of being one of God's elect, while he is willfully and habitually living in sin, is only deceiving himself and talking wicked blasphemy. Of course, it is hard to know what people really are; and many who make a fair show outwardly in religion may turn out at last to be rotten-hearted hypocrites. But where there is not, at least, some appearance of sanctification, we may be quite certain there is no election. The church catechism correctly and wisely teaches that the Holy Spirit "sanctifies all the elect people of God."

5. Sanctification is a reality that will always be seen. Like the great Head of the church, from whom it springs, it "cannot be hid." "Every tree is known by his own fruit" (Luke 6:44). A truly sanctified person may be so clothed with humility that he can see in himself nothing but infirmity and defects. Like Moses, when he came down from the mount, he may not be conscious that his face shines. Like the righteous, in the mighty parable of the sheep and the goats, he may not see that he has done anything worthy of his Master's notice and commendation: "When saw we You an hungry, and fed You?" (Matt. 25:37). But whether he sees it himself or not, others will always see in him a tone and taste and 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 and a misuse of words. Light may be very dim; but if there is only a spark in a dark room, it will be seen. Life may be very feeble; but if the pulse only beats a little, it will be felt. It is just the same with a sanctified man: his sanctification will be something felt and seen, though he himself may not understand it. A "saint," in whom nothing can be seen but worldliness or sin, is a kind of monster not recognized in the Bible!

6. Sanctification is a reality for which every believer is responsible. In saying this I would not be mistaken. I hold as strongly as anyone that every man on earth is accountable to God and that all the lost will be speechless and without excuse at the last day. Every man has power to "lose his own soul" (Matt. 26:26). But, while I hold this, I maintain that believers are eminently and peculiarly responsible and under a special obligation to live holy lives. They are not as others, dead and blind and unrenewed; they are alive unto God and have light and knowledge and a new principle within them. Whose fault is it, if they are not holy, but their own? On whom can they throw the blame, if they are not sanctified, but themselves? God, who has given them grace and 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 much forgotten. A man who professes to be a true Christian, while he sits still, content with a very low degree of sanctification (if indeed he has any at all), and coolly tells you he "can do nothing," is a very pitiable sight and a very ignorant man. Against this delusion let us watch and be on our guard. The Word of God always addresses its precepts to believers as accountable and responsible beings. If the Savior of sinners gives us renewing grace and calls us by His Spirit, we may be sure that He expects us to use our grace and not to go to sleep. It is forgetfulness of this which causes many believers to "grieve the Holy Spirit" and makes them very useless and uncomfortable Christians.

7. Sanctification is a thing which 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. More pardoned and more justified than he is when he first believes he cannot be, though he may feel it more. More sanctified he

certainly may be, because every grace in his new character may be strengthened, enlarged and deepened. This is the evident meaning of our Lord's last prayer for His disciples when He used the words, "Sanctify them," and of St. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians: "The very God of peace sanctify you" (John 17:17; 1 Thess. 5:23). In both cases the expression plainly implies the possibility of increased sanctification, while such an expression as "justify them" is never once in Scripture applied to a believer, because he cannot be more justified than he is. I can find no warrant in Scripture for the doctrine of "imputed sanctification." It is a doctrine which confuses differing principles and leads to evil consequences. Confuse things that differ and to lead to very evil consequences. Not least, it is a doctrine which is flatly contradicted by the experience of all the most eminent Christians. If there is any point on which God's holiest saints agree, it is this: that they see more and know more and feel more and do more and repent more and believe more as they get on in spiritual life, and in proportion to the closeness of their walk with God. In short, they "grow in grace," as St. Peter exhorts believers to do; and "abound more and more," according to the words of St. Paul (2 Peter 3:18; 1 Thess. 4:1).

8. Sanctification depends greatly on a diligent use of scriptural means. The "means of grace" are such as Bible reading, private prayer, and regularly worshiping God in Church, wherein one hears the Word taught and participates in the Lord's Supper. I lay it down as a simple matter of fact that 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. They are appointed channels through which the Holy Spirit conveys fresh supplies of grace to the soul and strengthens the work which He has begun in the inward man. Let men call this legal doctrine if they please, but I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no "spiritual gains without pains." 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. Sanctification is a thing which does not prevent a man having a great deal of inward spiritual conflict. By conflict I mean a struggle within the heart between the old nature and the new, the flesh and the spirit, which are to be found together in every believer (Gal. 5:17). A deep sense of that struggle, and a vast amount of mental discomfort from it, are no proof that a man is not sanctified. No, 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. He may be known by his warfare as well as by his peace. In saying this, I do not forget that I am contradicting the views of some well-meaning Christians who hold the doctrine called "sinless perfection." I cannot help that. I believe that what I say is confirmed by the language of St. Paul in the seventh chapter of Romans. That chapter I commend to the careful study of all my readers. I am quite satisfied that it does not describe the experience of an unconverted man, or of a young and unestablished Christian; but of an old experienced saint in close communion with God. None but such a man could say, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). I believe, furthermore, that what I say is proved by the experience of all the most eminent servants of Christ that have ever lived. The full proof is to be seen in their journals, their autobiographies and their lives. Believing all this, I shall never hesitate to tell people that inward conflict is no proof that a man is not holy, and that they must not think they are not sanctified because they do not feel entirely free from inward struggle. Such freedom we shall doubtless have in heaven, but we shall never enjoy it in this world. The heart of the best Christian, even at his best, is a field occupied by two rival camps, and the "company of two armies" (Song 6:13). Let the words of the thirteenth and fifteenth Articles be well considered by all churchmen: "The infection of nature does remain in them that are regenerated. Although baptized and born again in Christ, we offend in many things; and if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." *

10. Sanctification is a thing which cannot justify a man, and yet it pleases God. The holiest actions of the holiest saint that ever lived are all more or less full of defects and imperfections. They are either wrong in their motive or defective in their performance and in themselves are nothing better than "splendid sins," deserving God's wrath and condemnation. To suppose that such actions can stand the severity of God's judgment, atone for sin and merit heaven is simply absurd. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified." "We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:20-28). The only righteousness in which we can appear before God is the righteousness of another--even the perfect righteousness of our Substitute and Representative, Jesus Christ the Lord. His work, and not our work, is our only title to heaven. This is a truth which we should be ready to die to maintain. 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). "Obey your parents . . . for this is well pleasing unto the Lord" (Col. 3:20). "We . . . do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22). Let this never be forgotten, for it is a very comfortable doctrine. Just as a parent is pleased with the efforts of his little child to please him, though it be only by picking a daisy or walking across a room, so is our Father in heaven pleased with the poor performances of His believing children. He looks at the motive, principle and intention of their actions and not merely at their quantity and quality. He regards them as members of His own dear Son, and for His sake, wherever there is a single eye, He is well pleased. Those churchmen who dispute this would do well to study the twelfth Article of the Church of England.

11. Sanctification is a thing which 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, evidence, 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. I can find no evidence that will be admitted in that day, except sanctification. The question will not be how we talked and what we professed, but how we lived and what we did. Let no man deceive himself on this point. If anything is certain about the future, it is certain that there will be a judgment; and if anything is certain about judgment, it is certain that men's "works" and "doings" will be considered and examined in it (John 5:29; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:13). He who supposes works are of no importance because they cannot justify us is a very ignorant Christian. Unless he opens his eyes, he will find to his cost that if he comes to the bar of God without some evidence of grace, he had better never have been born.

12. Sanctification, in the last place, is absolutely necessary in order to train and prepare us for heaven. Most men hope to go to heaven when they die; but few, it may be feared, take the trouble to consider whether they would enjoy heaven if they got there. 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 for heaven while we are on earth. The notion of a purgatory after death, which shall turn sinners into saints, is a lying invention of man and is nowhere taught in the Bible. We must be saints before we die if we are to be saints afterwards in glory. The favorite idea of many, that dying men need nothing except absolution and forgiveness of sins to fit them for their great change, is a profound delusion. We need the work of the Holy Spirit as well as the work of Christ; we need renewal of the heart as well as the atoning blood; we need to be sanctified as well as to be justified. It is common to hear people saying on their deathbeds, "I only want the Lord to forgive me my sins, and take me to rest." But those who say such things forget that the rest of heaven would be utterly useless if we had no heart to enjoy it! What could an unsanctified man do in heaven, if by any chance he got there? Let that question be

fairly looked in the face and fairly answered. 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. When an eagle is happy in an iron cage, when a sheep is happy in the water, when an owl is happy in the blaze of noontday sun, when a fish is happy on the dry land--then, and not until then, will I admit that the unsanctified man could be happy in heaven. *

2. The visible evidence of sanctification

What are the visible marks of a sanctified man? What may we expect to see in him? This is a very wide and difficult department of our subject. It is wide because it necessitates the mention of many details which cannot be handled fully in the limits of a message like this. It is difficult because it cannot possibly be treated without giving offense. But truth should be spoken despite risk, and truth of this great magnitude should especially be spoken in our present day.

1. True sanctification then does not consist in mere talk about religion. This is a point which ought never to be forgotten. The vast increase of education and preaching in these latter days makes it absolutely necessary to raise a warning voice. People hear so much of gospel truth that they contract an unholy familiarity with its words and phrases and sometimes talk so fluently about its doctrines that you might think them true Christians. In fact it is sickening and disgusting to hear the cool and flippant language which many pour out about "conversion," "the Savior," "the gospel," "finding peace," "free grace" and the like, while they are notoriously serving sin or living for the world. Can we doubt that such talk is abominable in God's sight and is little better than cursing, swearing and taking God's name in vain? The tongue is not the only member that Christ bids us give to His service. God does not want His people to be mere empty tubs, sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. We must be sanctified, not only "in word and in tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18).

2. True sanctification does not consist in temporary religious feelings. This again is a point about which a warning is greatly needed. Mission services and revival meetings are attracting great attention in every part of the land and producing a great sensation. The Church of England seems to have taken a new lease of life and exhibits a new activity, and we ought to thank God for it. But these things have their attendant dangers as well as their advantages. Wherever wheat is sown, the devil is sure to sow tares. Many, it may be feared, appear moved and touched and roused under the preaching of the gospel, while in reality their hearts are not changed at all. A kind of animal excitement from the contagion of seeing others weeping, rejoicing or affected, is the true account of their case. Their wounds are only skin deep, and the peace they profess to feel is skin deep also. Like the stony-ground hearers, they receive the Word with joy (Matt. 13:20); but after a little they fall away, go back to the world and are harder and worse than before. Like Jonah's gourd, they come up suddenly in a night and perish in a night. Let these things not be forgotten. Let us beware in this day of healing wounds slightly, and crying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. Let us urge on everyone who exhibits new interest in religion to be content with nothing short of the deep, solid, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Reaction, after false religious excitement, is a most deadly disease of soul. When the devil is only temporarily cast out of a man in the heat of a revival, and by and by returns to his house, the last state becomes worse than the first. Better a thousand times begin more slowly, and then "continue in the Word" steadfastly, than begin in a hurry, without counting the cost, and by and by look back, with Lot's wife, and return to the world. I declare I know no state of soul more dangerous than to imagine we are born again and sanctified by the Holy Spirit because we have picked up a few religious feelings.

3. True sanctification does not consist in outward formalism and external devoutness. This is an enormous delusion, but unhappily a very common one. Thousands appear to imagine that true holiness is to be seen in an excessive quantity of bodily religion--in constant attendance on church services, reception of the Lord's Supper, and observance of fasts and saints' days; in multiplied bowings and turnings and gestures and postures during public worship; in wearing peculiar dresses, and the use of pictures and crosses. I freely admit that some people take up these things from conscientious motives and actually believe that they help their souls. But I am afraid that in many cases this external religiousness is made a substitute for inward holiness; and I am quite certain that it falls utterly short of sanctification of heart. Above all, when I see that many followers of this outward, sensuous, and formal style of Christianity are absorbed in worldliness and plunge headlong into its pomps and vanities without shame, I feel that there is need of very plain speaking on the subject. There may be an immense amount of "bodily service," while there is not a jot of real sanctification.

4. Sanctification does not consist in retirement from our place in life and the renunciation of our social duties. In every age it has been a snare with many to take up this line in the pursuit of holiness. Hundreds of hermits have buried themselves in some wilderness, and thousands of men and women have shut themselves up within the walls of monasteries and convents, under the vain idea that by so doing they would escape sin and become eminently holy. They have forgotten that no bolts and bars can keep out the devil and that, wherever we go, we carry that root of all evil, our own hearts. To become a monk or a nun or to join a "house of mercy" is not the high road to sanctification. True holiness does not make a Christian evade difficulties, but face and overcome them. Christ would have His people show that His grace is not a mere hot-house plant, which can only thrive under shelter, but a strong, hardy thing which can flourish in every relation of life. It is doing our duty in that state to which God has called us, like salt in the midst of corruption and light in the midst of darkness, which is a primary element in sanctification. It is not the man who hides himself in a cave, but the man who glorifies God as master or servant, parent or child, in the family and in the street, in business and in trade, who is the scriptural type of a sanctified man. Our Master Himself said in His last prayer, "I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil" (John 17:15).

5. Sanctification is not merely the occasional performance of right actions. Rather, it is the continual work of a new heavenly principle within, which runs through one's daily conduct in everything he does, big or small. It is not like a pump, which only sends forth water when worked upon from without, but like a perpetual fountain, from which a stream is ever flowing spontaneously and naturally. Even Herod, when he heard John the Baptist, "did many things," while his heart was utterly wrong in the sight of God (Mark 6:20). Just so there are scores of people in the present day who seem to have spasmodic fits of "goodness," as it is called, and do many right things under the influence of sickness, affliction, death in the family, public calamities or a sudden qualm of conscience. Yet all the time any intelligent observer can see plainly that they are not converted and that they know nothing of "sanctification." A true saint, like Hezekiah, will be whole-hearted. He will count God's commandments concerning all things to be right and "hate every false way" (2 Chr. 31:21; Ps. 119:104).

6. Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual respect to God's law and habitual effort to live in obedience to it as the rule of life. There is no greater mistake than to suppose that a Christian has nothing to do with the law and the Ten Commandments because he cannot be justified by keeping them. The same Holy Spirit who convinces the believer of sin by the law and leads him to Christ for justification will always lead him to a spiritual use of the law, as a friendly guide, in the pursuit of sanctification. Our Lord

Jesus Christ never made light of the Ten Commandments; on the contrary, in His first public discourse, the sermon on the mount, He expounded them and showed the searching nature of their requirements. St. Paul never made light of the law; on the contrary, he says, "The law is good, if a man use it lawfully." "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (1 Tim. 1:8; Rom. 7:22). He who pretends to be a saint, while he sneers at the Ten Commandments and thinks nothing of lying, hypocrisy, swindling, ill temper, slander, drunkenness and breach of the seventh commandment, is under a fearful delusion. He will find it hard to prove that he is a "saint" in the last day!

7. Genuine sanctification will show itself in an habitual endeavor to do Christ's will and to live by His practical precepts. These precepts are to be found scattered everywhere throughout the four Gospels, and especially in the sermon on the mount. He who supposes they were spoken without the intention of promoting holiness and that a Christian need not attend to them in his daily life is really little better than a lunatic, and at any rate is a grossly ignorant person. To hear some men talk and read some men's writings, one might imagine that our blessed Lord, when He was on earth, never taught anything but doctrine and left practical duties to be taught by others! The slightest knowledge of the four Gospels ought to tell us that this is a complete mistake. What His disciples ought to be and to do is continually brought forward in our Lord's teaching. A truly sanctified man will never forget this. He serves a Master who said, "You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:14).

8. Genuine sanctification will show itself in an habitual desire to live up to the standard which St. Paul sets before the churches in his writings. That standard is to be found in the closing chapters of nearly all his Epistles. The common idea of many persons that St. Paul's writings are full of nothing but doctrinal statements and controversial subjects--justification, election, predestination, prophecy and the like--is an entire delusion and a melancholy proof of the ignorance of Scripture which prevails in these latter days. I defy anyone to read St. Paul's writings carefully, without finding in them a large quantity of plain practical directions about the Christian's duty in every relation of life, and about our daily habits, temper and behavior to one another. These directions were written down by inspiration of God for the perpetual guidance of professing Christians. He who does not attend to them may possibly pass muster as a member of a church or a chapel, but he certainly is not what the Bible calls a "sanctified" man.

9. Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual attention to the active graces which our Lord so beautifully exemplified, and especially to the grace of charity. "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one to another" (John 13:34, 35). A sanctified man will try to do good in the world and to lessen the sorrow and increase the happiness of all around him. He will aim to be like his Master, full of kindness and love to everyone--and this not in word only, by calling people "dear," but by deeds and actions and self-denying work, according as he has opportunity. The selfish Christian professor who wraps himself up in his own conceit of superior knowledge and seems to care nothing whether others sink or swim, go to heaven or hell, so long as he walks to church or chapel in his Sunday best and is called a "sound member"--such a man knows nothing of sanctification. He may think himself a saint on earth, but he will not be a saint in heaven. Christ will never be found the Savior of those who know nothing of following His example. Saving faith and real converting grace will always produce some conformity to the image of Jesus (Col. 3:10). *

10. Genuine sanctification, in the last place, will show itself in habitual attention to the passive graces of Christianity. When I speak of passive graces, I mean those graces which are especially shown in submission to the will of God and in bearing and forbearing towards one another. Few people, perhaps,

unless they have examined the point, have an idea how much is said about these graces in the New Testament and how important a place they seem to fill. This is the special point which St. Peter dwells upon in commending our Lord Jesus Christ's example to our notice: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:21-23). This is the one piece of profession which the Lord's prayer requires us to make: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," and the one point that is commented upon at the end of the prayer. This is the point which occupies one third of the list of the fruits of the Spirit supplied by St. Paul. Nine are named and three of these, patience, gentleness and meekness, are unquestionably passive graces (Gal. 5:22, 23). I must plainly say that I do not think this subject is sufficiently considered by Christians. The passive graces are no doubt harder to attain than the active ones, but they are precisely the graces which have the greatest influence on the world. Of one thing I feel very sure: it is nonsense to pretend to sanctification unless we follow after the meekness, gentleness, patience and forgivingness of which the Bible makes so much. People who are habitually giving way to peevish and cross tempers in daily life and are constantly sharp with their tongues and disagreeable to all around them, spiteful people, vindictive people, revengeful people, malicious people--of whom, alas, the world is only too full--all such know little as they should know about sanctification.

3. The distinction between justification and sanctification

I now propose to consider, in the last place, the distinction between justification and sanctification. Wherein do they agree, and wherein do they differ?

This branch of our subject is one of great importance, though I fear it will not seem so to all my readers. I shall handle it briefly, but I dare not pass it over altogether. Too many are apt to look at nothing but the surface of things in religion and regard nice distinctions in theology as questions of "words and names," which are of little real value. But I warn all who are in earnest about their souls that the discomfort which arises from not "distinguishing things that differ" in Christian doctrine is very great indeed; and I especially advise them, if they love peace, to seek clear views about the matter before us. Justification and sanctification are two distinct things, we must always remember. Yet there are points in which they agree and points in which they differ. Let us try to find out what they are.

In what, then, are justification and sanctification ALIKE?

- a. Both proceed originally from the free grace of God. It is of His gift alone that believers are justified or sanctified at all.
- b. Both are part of that great work of salvation which Christ, in the eternal covenant, has undertaken on behalf of His people. Christ is the fountain of life, from which pardon and holiness both flow. The root of each is Christ.
- c. Both are to be found in the same persons. Those who are justified are always sanctified, and those who are sanctified are always justified. God has joined them together, and they cannot be put asunder.
- d. Both begin at the same time. The moment a person begins to be a justified person, he also begins to be a sanctified person. He may not feel it, but it is a fact.

e. Both are alike necessary to salvation. No one ever reached heaven without a renewed heart as well as forgiveness, without the Spirit's grace as well as the blood of Christ, without a fitness for eternal glory as well as a title. The one is just as necessary as the other.

Such are the points on which justification and sanctification agree. Let us now reverse the picture and see wherein they differ.

a. Justification is the reckoning and counting a man to be righteous for the sake of another, even Jesus Christ the Lord. Sanctification is the actual making a man inwardly righteous, though it may be in a very feeble degree.

b. The righteousness we have by our justification is not our own, but the everlasting perfect righteousness of our great Mediator Christ, imputed to us, and made our own by faith. The righteousness we have by sanctification is our own righteousness, imparted, inherent and wrought in us by the Holy Spirit but mingled with much infirmity and imperfection.

c. In justification our own works have no place at all, and simple faith in Christ is the one thing needful. In sanctification our own works are of vast importance, and God bids us fight and watch and pray and strive and take pains and labor.

d. Justification is a finished and complete work, and a man is perfectly justified the moment he believes. Sanctification is an imperfect work, comparatively, and will never be perfected until we reach heaven.

e. Justification admits of no growth or increase: a man is as much justified the hour he first comes to Christ by faith as he will be to all eternity. Sanctification is eminently a progressive work and admits of continual growth and enlargement so long as a man lives.

f. Justification has special reference to our persons, our standing in God's sight, and our deliverance from guilt. Sanctification has special reference to our natures and the moral renewal of our hearts.

g. Justification gives us our title to heaven and boldness to enter in. Sanctification gives us our fitness for heaven and prepares us to enjoy it when we dwell there.

h. Justification is the act of God about us and is not easily discerned by others. Sanctification is the work of God within us and cannot be hid in its outward manifestation from the eyes of men.

I commend these distinctions to the attention of all my readers, and I ask them to ponder them well. I am persuaded that one great cause of the darkness and uncomfortable feelings of many well-meaning people in the matter of religion is their habit of confounding, and not distinguishing, justification and sanctification. It can never be too strongly impressed on our minds that they are two separate things. No doubt they cannot be divided, and everyone that is a partaker of either is a partaker of both. But never, never ought they to be confounded, and never ought the distinction between them to be forgotten.

The nature and visible marks of sanctification have been brought before us. What practical reflections ought the whole matter to raise in our minds?

1. For one thing, let us all awake to a sense of the perilous state of many professing Christians. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord; without sanctification there is no salvation (Heb. 12:14). Then what an enormous amount of so-called religion there is which is perfectly useless! What an immense proportion of

church-goers and chapel-goers are in the broad road that leads to destruction! The thought is awful, crushing and overwhelming. Oh, that preachers and teachers would open their eyes and realize the condition of souls around them! Oh, that men could be persuaded to "flee from the wrath to come"! If unsanctified souls can be saved and go to heaven, the Bible is not true. Yet the Bible is true and cannot lie! What must the end be!

2. Let us make sure work of our own condition and never rest until we feel and know that we are "sanctified" ourselves. What are our tastes and choices and likings and inclinations? This is the great testing question. It matters little what we wish and what we hope and what we desire to be before we die. What are we now? What are we doing? Are we sanctified or not? If not, the fault is all our own.

3. If we would be sanctified, our course is clear and plain: we must begin with Christ. We must go to Him as sinners, with no plea but that of utter need, and cast our souls on Him by faith, for peace and reconciliation with God. We must place ourselves in His hands, as in the hands of a good physician, and cry to Him for mercy and grace. We must wait for nothing to bring with us as a recommendation. The very first step towards sanctification, no less than justification, is to come with faith to Christ. We must first live and then work.

4. If we would grow in holiness and become more sanctified, we must continually go on as we began, and be ever making fresh applications to Christ. He is the Head from which every member must be supplied (Eph. 4:16). To live the life of daily faith in the Son of God and to be daily drawing out of His fullness the promised grace and strength which He has laid up for His people--this is the grand secret of progressive sanctification. Believers who seem at a standstill are generally neglecting close communion with Jesus, and so grieving the Spirit. He who prayed, "Sanctify them," the last night before His crucifixion is infinitely willing to help everyone who by faith applies to Him for help and desires to be made more holy.

5. Let us not expect too much from our own hearts here below. At our best we shall find in ourselves daily cause for humiliation and discover that we are needy debtors to mercy and grace every hour. The more light we have, the more we shall see our own imperfection. Sinners we were when we began, sinners we shall find ourselves as we go on: renewed, pardoned, justified, yet sinners to the very last. Our absolute perfection is yet to come, and the expectation of it is one reason why we should long for heaven.

6. Finally, let us never be ashamed of making much of sanctification and contending for a high standard of holiness. While some are satisfied with a miserably low degree of attainment, and others are not ashamed to live on without any holiness at all, content with a mere round of church-going and chapel-going, but never getting on, like a horse in a mill, let us stand fast in the old paths, follow after eminent holiness ourselves and recommend it boldly to others. This is the only way to be really happy.

Let us feel convinced, whatever others may say, that holiness is happiness and that the man who gets through life most comfortably is the sanctified man. No doubt there are some true Christians who from ill health, or family trials, or other secret causes, enjoy little sensible comfort and go mourning all their days on the way to heaven. But these are exceptional cases. As a general rule, in the long run of life, it will be found true, that "sanctified" people are the happiest people on earth. They have solid comforts which the world can neither give nor take away. "The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness." "Great peace have those who love Your law." It was said by One who cannot lie: "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." But it is also written, "There is no peace unto the wicked" (Prov. 3:17; Ps. 119:165; Matt. 11:30; Isa. 48:22).

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/sanctification/>

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