

Sanctification: Major Misconceptions

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1990

Introduction: The English word, "sanctification" means "to make holy or separate." The Old Testament word for sanctification (Hebrew "kadash") means "to hallow or consecrate" and the New Testament word (Greek "hagiadzo") means "to consecrate or set apart."

There are a variety of views on sanctification, some of which, have caused confusion and even false teaching among Christians.

1. VIEWING SANCTIFICATION THE SAME AS SALVATION (OR THE GUARANTEE OF SALVATION)

A. Wesleyan View:

"It is a common thing for those who are sanctified, to believe they cannot fall... Nay, sometimes they have utterly lost the life of God, and sin hath regained dominion over them." (J. A. Wood, Christian Perfectionism as Taught by John Wesley, p. 115)

B. Nazarene, Methodist, Pentecostal View:

Denominations that are based on Arminian theology state that "man has received his salvation as an act of his will and he may forfeit his salvation as an act of the will, or through specific sins." (Paul Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology, p. 340)

C. Biblical View:

(1.) We cannot make the outward appearance a total guarantee of salvation. The Corinthian believers were called "saints" (i.e. "sanctified ones" 1 Corinthians 1:2) yet they were also the most "fleshly" (i.e. "sinful" 1 Corinthians 3:1).

(2.) We cannot state that those who sin are not saved because they no longer possess their sanctification. The fact is saved people still sin and to say they don't is to deceive yourself and call God a liar
(1 John 1:8,10).

(3.) This view fails to recognize the difference between "positional sanctification" a one time act of God within salvation, (Hebrews 10:10), and "progressive sanctification" an on going process of making our daily life conform to our position of salvation, (Hebrews 10:14).

2. EQUATING SANCTIFICATION WITH SINLESS PERFECTION

A. Wesleyan View:

"Entire sanctification is said to involve the eradication of our sinful nature. Wesley said that at the time of 'entire sanctification' all inward sin is taken away." (Anthony A. Hoekema, Saved by Grace, p. 217)

B. Nazarene View:

"The manual of the church of the Nazarene states that through 'entire sanctification' believers are made free from original sin." (Hoekema, p. 217)

C. Biblical View:

(1.) We cannot define the Christian life of sanctification as sinlessness. The fact is saved people still sin and to say they don't is to deceive yourself and call God a liar, (1 John 1:8,10).

(2.) Some are convinced that the Christian who is sanctified no longer sins, based on statements in the English translation "Whoever abides in Him does not sin" (1 John 3:6,9;5:18; the word "sin" Greek "hamartanei" is a present tense verb emphasizing the habitual practice or lifestyle of sin, not a single act. It should be translated, "does not keep on sinning").

(3.) This view fails to recognize the difference between "progressive sanctification" an on going process of making our daily life conform to our position of salvation, and "perfective sanctification" where in the future the Christian is totally transformed into the likeness of Christ.

3. MAKING SANCTIFICATION THE SAME THING AS JUSTIFICATION

A. Holiness View:

Though not a theological position, this concept comes across something like this, "If you are not able to walk the walk, then you are not saved." If you are justified in Christ you should be able to avoid all sin. If you can't avoid sin or aren't avoiding sin, then you were not justified in Christ.

B. Biblical View:

(1.) We cannot make sanctification and justification synonymous with each other because they are three separate acts which occur at the same time, (1 Corinthians 6:11, Christians at Corinth were washed, sanctified, and justified, at salvation.)

(2.) We cannot make justification and sanctification mean the same thing. "In justification God does not make the sinner righteous; He declares that person is righteous (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16). In sanctification God sets the Christian apart positionally into His righteousness so that he can live a righteous life (Romans 6:1-7; 8: 11-14)." (John F. MacArthur, Jr., Faith Works, p. 90)

4. RECEIVING SANCTIFICATION AND JUSTIFICATION BY SEPARATE ACTS OF FAITH

A. Wesleyan View:

"Entire sanctification is said to be an experience distinct from and subsequent to justification, that, in fact, a person may not be 'entirely sanctified' until many years after he or she has been justified.... In churches teaching 'perfectionism,' therefore, there are two types of Christians: merely justified believers, and believers who are both justified and sanctified." (Hoekema, p. 216)

B. Keswick View:

"The 'higher life' involved a life of entire surrender to the Lord and perfect trust in Him. The believer was urged to abandon himself to Christ in a crisis experience and to receive sanctification by faith as a gift of God's love, just as he received salvation by faith." (Charles C. Ryie, "Contrasting View on Sanctification" p. 192). "The Victorious Life view... sees justification and sanctification as two distinct gifts of God to be received by separate acts of faith." (Ryie, p 194).

C. Biblical View:

We can not make justification and sanctification two separate acts of faith because though they are separate concepts they are received at the same time as salvation, (1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:11, the Christians at Corinth were washed, justified, and sanctified at the same time. The word "sanctified" is an aorist tense verb stressing the fact or state with no duration or process).

5. RECEIVING SANCTIFICATION AS A SECOND BLESSING

A. Wesleyan View:

"Entire sanctification' is said to be an instantaneous experience that is received by faith. After this 'second blessing' has been received, believers are able to continue to reveal the kind of 'Christian perfection' that has been described above, a life of wholehearted love for God and others." (Hoekema, pp. 216-217)

B. Biblical View:

We cannot make sanctification something received after salvation as a "second blessing" because it is received at the same time as salvation, (1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:11, the Christians at Corinth were washed, justified, and sanctified all at the same time. The word "sanctified" is an aorist tense verb stressing the fact or state with no duration or process).

6. CONDITIONING SANCTIFICATION UPON THE BAPTISM OR FULLNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. Pentecostal View:

"In the holiness movement the phrase the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which was destined to have such wide significance in Pentecostal teaching, as the Pentecostal historian Kendrick confesses, 'was popularized as the name for the experience of sanctification or the second blessing. All who came under the Holiness ministry became familiar with the 'spirit baptism.'" (Merrill F. Unger, The Baptism & Gifts of the Holy Spirit, p. 9)

B. Keswick View:

"The fullness of the Spirit is an experience that is not shared by all believers. Receiving that fullness (the second blessing) involves a definite act of faith that is separable from regeneration. All believers may experience that fullness (of the Spirit) through faith and absolute surrender." (Ryie, p.192)

C. Biblical View:

(1.) We cannot make "the baptism of the Spirit" a separate act (i.e. "a second blessing") from salvation because the "baptism of the Spirit" occurs at the same time as regeneration and is the act of placing the Christian in Christ, (1 Corinthians 12:13).

(2.) We cannot confuse the "filling of the Spirit" with the "baptism of the Spirit" by making it a "second blessing." "Filling" is merely the Holy Spirit's control over the Christian's life, not another "baptism" of the Spirit, (Ephesians 5:18).

Conclusion: Christians should not be confused by denominational "theories" that seek to support their traditional views of sanctification. They should understand what God's Word says about the

truth of sanctification. They should also study the three "tenses" (or time distinctions) God's word reveals about sanctification.