

SANCTIFICATION II

by Ron Harvey

INTRODUCTION

Sanctification is a word that means to set apart for a particular use or to make holy. The general sense in which we think of sanctification is as a progressive work of God whereby he makes us more like Christ. But,

There is a sense in which we are already sanctified.

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ and called.

Jude 1

“by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.”

Hebrews 10:14

By this, we understand that we have been made holy in Christ. We are sanctified. We are set apart for his use. We are set apart for his glory. We are set apart from the masses and fully equipped for the enjoyment of God both now and in heaven. There is nothing more to be done. It has all been done for us. It has been imputed to us and imparted to us.

So, is there such a thing as progressive sanctification?

If I am sanctified already, if I am made holy already by imputation, if I am fully fit for heaven already, and if I should die today I am fully equipped for heaven, then in what sense is sanctification progressive? How shall I be more sanctified tomorrow when I am fully sanctified today?

Listen to A. W. Pink:

And the answer is that any spiritual growth that we may experience in this life, is simply gaining “a clearer understanding and a fuller apprehension of what God has made Christ to be unto the believer and of his perfect standing and state in Him.” A. W. Pink.

If I may paraphrase, “We grow spiritually by apprehending the love of Christ more and more and further apprehending that by his grace we are already sanctified.”

Example: Sometimes we are apt to pray, Lord, please make me more holy so that I will be more fit for heaven.

But Paul prayed, “I thank you Father who hath made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints. (Col.1:12)

Now heaven is really our inheritance. Now an inheritance is not something that we acquire by self-denial or self-improvement. It is not something that we purchase with our labors

or with our good works. Rather, an inheritance is something that we acquire by our relationship to another. We receive an inheritance because we are born into a family. We are someone's child. This has nothing to do with merit or works or personal growth. But, it has everything to do with a family relationship.

Example: Someone may be an absolutely worthless individual, but he happens to be the son of a very wealthy man. And when that wealthy man dies, the son inherits a fortune.

And this is a very good illustration of the way our inheritance works. Look at what Paul said:

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.

Romans 8:16, 17

Here is the equation: Children of God = Heirs of God

What makes us fit for heaven is not sanctification, but rather regeneration. That's the moment that we received life. That is the moment that we received a new nature. That is the moment that we became the children of God.

But as many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:12, 13

Last week we saw that,

I. Christian growth does not signify advancing in God's favor.

And tonight, we pick up by suggesting that,

II. The need for Christian growth does not indicate that regeneration was incomplete.

We should note that,

A. Regeneration was a complete and perfect work in itself.

Regeneration was never intended to be the whole work of salvation. Just as election was not the whole work of salvation, but rather just the beginning; and just as the redemptive work of Christ was not the entire work of salvation, regeneration was not the entire work of salvation.

But to quote A.W. Pink, “Regeneration was in itself the most radical change ever made in the human soul. Regeneration is a more radical and revolutionizing change than glorification. The one is passing from death to life, the other an entrance into the fullness of life. The one is a bringing into existence of “the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Eph. 4:22) the other is a reaching unto the full stature of the new man. The one is a translation into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, (Col. 1:13) the other an induction into the higher privileges of that kingdom.”

Regeneration is that grand and glorious work of God whereby a dead soul is made alive. It is the greatest and most immediate change that will ever occur to the human soul. It is the impartation of life itself to a formerly dead soul.

Example: I suppose regeneration corresponds most closely to conception in the physical realm. It is the miracle of life out of nothing.

But even as dramatic and radical as regeneration is,

B. Regeneration is not the completion of the work of salvation.

God has ordained that he would not only bring you to life, in regeneration, but also that he would cause you to grow up spiritually.

Example: Just as a new baby has all the wonderful qualities of life and yet has no idea what he shall be when he grows to maturity,

So, a newly regenerated soul has no sense of what he shall be in his spiritual maturity.

Example: No one knows whether he will be 6’ 8” or 4’ 8” when he grows up physically.

And a new Christian has very little sense of where God is taking him.

In his spiritual infancy, the new believer thinks in terms of growing by the performance of outward displays in order to please God.

But as we will see, spiritual growth or sanctification is more inward than outward and focuses more on the works of the heart than on the works of the hands.

Example: I think a parent would be more pleased with a child who had a heart of obedience rather than a child who merely obeyed out of compulsion.

Example: A pastor would be pleased if his flock was becoming more pure at heart rather than merely performing religious acts.

In the work of sanctification, as we will see later, God is leading the believer not so much to the production of outward works, but rather to a greater knowledge of Him, to a deeper delight in spiritual things, to a greater love of Christ, to a greater faith and to an advancement in personal piety. And when these are achieved, there perhaps will be works, maybe even mighty works wrought by the hand of God rather than by the hands of men.

Now we have seen that,

Sanctification does not signify advancing in God's favor, and

The need for sanctification (spiritual growth) does not indicate that regeneration was incomplete.

And now we will see that,

III. Christian growth does not make us fit for heaven.

There is some widespread belief that even though God has made a new creation by regeneration and has forgiven sins and justified the sinner, that still the sinner is not fit for heaven and must undergo some transformation in order to prepare for the heavenly state. The thought enters in that perhaps I am not quite good enough in my present condition to fully enter in to that blessed state and that I need more refinement. I need to be sanctified or made more holy so that I can fully enter in.

But we should understand that we are fit for heaven the moment that God makes us a new creation. There is nothing more required for us to be ready for entry into that blessed state with Christ.

You would think that the Christian would learn from his own experience that he will never attain unto such a state of growth that would make him acceptable for heaven. In fact, most Christians, as they mature, frankly acknowledge that whatever progress they have made in the Christian life is quite unsatisfactory and they have no prospect of reaching any state of completion in terms of spiritual growth.

Furthermore, many Christians die prematurely and in various stages of their spiritual growth. Therefore, it can never be said that our spiritual growth qualifies us for heaven. Many infants die before they achieve any spiritual growth beyond regeneration and we believe them to be accepted in the beloved and fully fit for heaven.

There is only one righteousness that qualifies for heaven and that is perfect righteousness – the Righteousness of Christ. Whatever spiritual growth we attain on this earth will never equip us for heaven beyond what we already are in Christ.

So, why does God leave us here on this earth for some time after we are born again? If there is nothing more we need, if we are perfectly fitted for heaven by the Righteousness of Christ that is imputed to us, if our salvation is fully accomplished and a sure and blessed heaven

awaits in the wings, why does he leave us here for a time?

And there are several reasons which we will discuss. But there is a general principle which needs to be understood. And, that principle is that all things in this world are for the general purpose of glorifying God. They are not first and foremost for the happiness of man. And I would suggest that even though God has fully saved us and even though it would perhaps be better for us if we should go straight to heaven, yet there are certain purposes to be accomplished in leaving us in this world for a season.

God may leave us here for a season,

1. To glorify himself by demonstrating his keeping power.

Do you remember Jude 24,

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory . . .

This is God's promise – that he will keep you. And He will be praised in the end when he has kept you through it all. He will not only keep you from the dangers of a hostile world, but he will keep you from the dangers that lurk within your own heart. That old indwelling sin that threatens to derail you daily will not prevail, but he will keep you. He has kept you for these many years and he will keep you to the end. And when you are all kept unto that day, you will gather around his throne and you will praise him for keeping you to the end.

Why does God leave us here?

2. To demonstrate the sufficiency of his grace.

Through all of our weaknesses and all of our infirmities, we will find that his grace was sufficient. Was there physical sickness? We will find that it was his grace that carried us through. Were there emotional hurts along the way? We will find that it was his grace that carried us through. Was there loss and regret sprinkled along the road of life? Still, we will discover that it was his grace that turned loss into gain and regret into joy. And when we gather around his throne we will sing praises to his grace that was sufficient for every cause in life.

Why does God leave us here?

3. To maintain a witness for himself in an otherwise wicked and godless world.

God has chosen to witness to the world through his people. As weak and unwilling as we are sometimes, yet, he uses us to speak the Word of God to the world. You say, when did I speak the Word of God? And I say, "When you were cursed and you cursed not in return; when you were slapped and you thought it better to turn the other cheek than to strike back; and when you gave a cup of water to a thirsty brother. And when you read a bible story to your children you spoke his word. And when you offered a word of comfort from the Scriptures; and when you

taught children a Sunday School class you were a witness.” And God leaves us here as a witness in an otherwise dark world.

Why does God leave us here?

4. To serve as salt in preserving the human race from moral suicide.

Ye are the salt of the earth. (Mt. 5:13)

Salt was used to preserve foods before there was refrigeration. And God uses his people to preserve the world from completely spoiling due to sin and moral corruption. God exerts a restraining influence on the world and he uses his people as an instrument of preservation.

God may leave us here,

5. To preach the gospel to the elect which are as yet in unbelief. And,
6. To prove to the world that his regenerate people will serve Him even in difficult circumstances. And,
7. To deepen their appreciation for the purity and bliss of heaven compared to the sin and sadness of this life.

For all of these reasons, God has chosen to leave us for a time here on this earth in these fallen circumstances. But he has not left us here for us to make further attempts to gain his acceptance. We are accepted. We will never be any more accepted than we are right now in Christ. Regeneration and conversion make us accepted. Sanctification or spiritual growth does not make us accepted in the least.

Now God doesn't ask you to obey him and to grow spiritually in order to be accepted. And this will invariably raise the question in the minds of carnal men: Why then should we serve Him? Why should we strive for spiritual growth? Why should I apply myself to the hard task of putting away sin and putting on holiness? Why should I not simply leave God to his work and rest easy in the security of his acceptance?

The simple answer is that God's super-abounding love and acceptance of his people is not an inducement to a life of negligence toward God, but is rather the highest inducement to strive for holiness.

This will never be understood by the men of the world.

Men operate by works. Men will not serve one another unless they are paid for their service. And if an employer pays a man in advance, it is likely that the employee may skip away with the money and not do the work.

But God operates by grace. He gives his gifts all on the front end. And he accepts his people unconditionally. And this is the greatest motive for service.