

1THESSALONIANS 4:3b-8 "It Is God's Will That You Should Be Sanctified"

1TH 4:3 "It is God's will that you should be sanctified:"

Last week, you'll remember, I introduced this biblical teaching of sanctification with the importance of reflecting on and understanding the beauty of justification from God through Christ.

Because only as we understand and appreciate the salvation that we have in Him will we, with thankful hearts, desire to reach out to Christ for everything that we might live according to His will by His power and strength and love.

One of the definitions for justification comes from Charles Hodge in his Systematic Theology where he says, "It is a declarative act in which God pronounces the sinner just or righteous, so that he cannot be justly condemned, but is in justice entitled to the reward promised."

Donald Grey Barnhouse defines it this way: "Justification is the act of God whereby He declares an ungodly man to be perfect while he is still ungodly."

And so, in receiving justification from God, we who have trusted Christ as our Lord and Savior from the penalty of sin are declared "not guilty" before the throne of God because Christ stood in our place and took our guilt, died for our sin and gave us His righteousness that we might stand before the Father as His children who will share in an eternal inheritance.

And as we contemplate our position before God our hearts should desire to love Him, to draw close to Him and be the obedient children He wants us to be to His honor and glory.

And as we look at this 3rd verse we see that not only is sanctification the will of God for our lives, it is to be entered into with a posture of obedience so that the Spirit of God may move us towards all that sanctification involves.

When we think of the word sanctification we usually associate it with the idea of good moral behavior. And though this is the outcome of what sanctification accomplishes the word speaks more of the position that we have in Christ.

Just as in justification we are positionally not guilty of the penalty of our sin because of Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf, with sanctification it too speaks of a position we have in relation to God.

The Hebrew word "to sanctify" is *qadash* which many believe is related to the word *chadash*, which is "to shine", signifying the idea of holiness or purity.

Berkhoff states that "others, with a greater degree of probability, derive the word from the root *qad* meaning to cut and so the idea here is to cut oneself off or to be separate from the ways of the world."

And so, positionally, we are set apart by God from the world and by the power of the Holy Spirit we are enabled to demonstrate that we don't belong to the rebellious system of the world, but to God who has called us from darkness to the light of His Son. And so, in that sense we do demonstrate a morality which is distinct from the world.

One definition of 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." (Westminster Catechism)

Justification is an act on God's part towards those who believe on Christ which takes place one time. Once we are declared just or righteous by the blood of Christ that position cannot be taken away. However, with sanctification God is personally involved on a daily basis and so it's on going for the rest of our lives in this life.

And yet sanctification is no less a part of our salvation than is justification or glorification for that matter. Though they may be different parts of our salvation they cannot be separated. It's a package deal from our gracious and loving God.

And so, our sanctification should not be taken lightly as though we have the option to be more and more conformed into the image of Jesus Christ on a daily basis. Remember, it is God's will that we be sanctified.

Now, if sanctification is part of our salvation, then it stands to reason that it is supernatural in nature. Our justification is supernatural in that we have been born again to a living hope and are reconciled to the Father. That is a birth from death to life which only God can accomplish.

Likewise our glorification is supernatural in that it is God who will bring us to Himself, as we are adorned with the righteousness of Christ, and Who will ultimately receive us into His presence where we will be with Him in intimate fellowship forever on the new earth.

But how many Christians approach sanctification with the same sense of the supernatural presence and dependence on the God who changes us from the inside out? Sometimes people confuse sanctification as simply observing the morals of God set down in the Bible, which find their expression in the 10 commandments.

And so you'll find people who for all outward appearances seem to be holy. They're honest, hard working, and fair. They don't seem to have a problem with certain vices and even demonstrate what we might call a fear of God as they go to church on a regular basis.

And as commendable as that may be, that alone falls very short of sanctification. As Berkhoff says, "the two things differ in nature as much as a clean heart from clean clothes."

Sanctification is not simply a washing up of the outward appearances by regulating your life to a set of rules, even if they're godly rules.

The Pharisees did as much. The Pharisees were a religious sect among the Jews who knew the law of God and could quote verse and chapter and for all intents and purposes looked to be the most godly people who walked the face of the earth.

And yet Jesus, who had a number of encounters with them, knew their hearts and knew that their outward behavior was a cover for their inward deadness as is found in Matthew 23:13-33.

It's interesting that the apostle Paul speaks of his former life as a Pharisee and how that life of religiosity could not gain access to the Father. In fact, he warns his readers to avoid such people who put their trust in the deeds of the flesh.

PHI 3:2-11 "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh-- 4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a

Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. 7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

Paul understood that simply trying to clean up the outside couldn't make himself righteous in the sight of God and yet this same man when speaking to Christians urges them to flee from those things which are ungodly.

You see, sanctification is a supernatural process which can only take place in the life of a believer who has been justified by the redemptive work of Christ.

That's why when it comes to supposed good works to try to earn favor with God outside of Christ the Bible says in ISA 64:6 "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."

So what role do good works play in the life of a believer if true sanctification moves us in that direction? We must understand that though we are not saved by good works we are saved unto good works.

EPH 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

These "good works" come as a result of a brand new nature which we did not possess outside of Christ, but now possess as the Spirit of God has given us this new nature; a nature which is alive in Christ and desires the things of Christ. In the Bible it's referred to as the new man, a new creation, new creatures in Christ, as opposed to the old man who did not seek after God, which refers to the sinful nature.

The new man in Christ realizes that we no longer want to walk in such a way that dishonors our new Lord but now, by His Spirit

dwelling inside of us, we are empowered and desire to walk in a way that is in line with our justification.

We are declared just or righteous, let us then walk according to the righteousness we have in Christ and not according to the ways we walked outside of Christ. How do we do that? Only by faith as we look to God and rely upon the Holy Spirit as He instructs us through His word for the direction that we need.

We are instructed to be imitators of Christ, to be conformed into His image. This is what sanctification is. And so it is a mark of a believer who genuinely has a relationship with God through Christ. It is a process. It doesn't happen over-night. But, it is a submission to the will of God.

In justification we did not personally participate like we do in sanctification. Justification took place outside of us 2,000 years ago at the cross of Christ when He took our penalty and paid our debt to God, declaring us "not guilty" when we placed our faith in Christ.

It's true that we participated in the sense that we accepted that justification for us by faith, but the actual act of what justification demanded; perfect obedience, was something only Christ could accomplish. And this justification was paid by Christ for those He came to actually save.

However, the process of God's sanctification is something we are encouraged to participate in as we submit to God by faith in obedience. But, we must never think that sanctification can take place without the supernatural involvement of God Himself.

If it could then we would have something to boast in. As it is Paul tells us in GAL 6:14 "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

And in 1CO 1:30-31 "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

And so even our sanctification is something we cannot take credit for even though we are told to submit as He works in our lives that we may be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

Now, sanctification can be seen from both the negative and the positive. The positive is that as we come to God daily and seek His strength and direction in His word we will find our lives taking on a new perspective and a new direction which is Christ-like.

We see these godly qualities of Christ in GAL 5:22-25 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

Paul is saying that if we are new creatures in Christ then we must submit to the Spirit who indwells us and directs us to magnify Christ in all of our behavior; not for the sake of drawing attention to ourselves but to draw attention to our heavenly Father.

The negative way of looking at our sanctification is to see it in terms of what it is not. You see, prior to coming to Christ for salvation, the only thing we were interested in was ourselves and pleasing number one. And more often than not the fruit of that life outside of Christ looked like what Paul refers to in Galatians.

GAL 5:19 "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."

And so Paul, back in our text, describes what sanctification or living in the new nature of Christ in the Spirit is not. He gives the Thessalonians a taste of what it's like to live according to the will of God, which is our sanctification, by expecting them to flee from those things which dishonor God, which are out of accord with sanctification.

1TH 4:3b-8 "that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit."

What Paul shows us here about our sanctification is that it's a matter of choice. But, in Christ, for the first time in our lives, we have the power by the Spirit to make a godly choice that pleases our Lord.

He speaks here of sexual immorality. In those days, not unlike today, these types of sins were common place. But in verse 4 Paul makes it quite clear that we are to control our passions. Those who are married must enjoy the privilege and the beauty of sexual relations but only with his or her mate and they must not go outside of that holy union.

Likewise, those who are not married must not practice those things which promote sexual activity or actually engage in sex which God Himself has designed only for marriage.

To do so is in direct violation of God's command, but it is also a slap in the face to God. Because on the one hand we say we accept His justification by faith, which is part of our salvation, but reject His sanctification which is part of that same salvation.

In fact, Paul calls it what it is in verse 5; lustful passion, and he equates that kind of behavior with unbelievers, the Gentiles who do not know God.

He's saying that if you are engaged in such activity you are acting no better than an unbeliever. In fact, it's worse because you have tasted the kindness of the Lord and His truth and you reject it by such action.

Now if you think that sanctification is not a big deal with God then check out verse 6 where Paul warns them who have turned to their own ways and walk according to the flesh, "The Lord is the avenger in all these things."

The NIV makes it a little clearer by saying, "The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you."

This is no laughing matter which is why God encourages all of His people to walk in the Spirit so you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.

"For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man, but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you."

Those are sobering words. Don't take them lightly.

It's a spiritual battle and you cannot enter it with an attitude that your flesh will not succumb when you encounter various temptations.

God say's, if you won't choose My ways and if you continue to trample the love I've bestowed on you, then as one of My children you will be disciplined for your behavior until you understand the great love that has been given you in Christ and how the Lord desires that love in return.

And this is the problem isn't it? Though we have a new nature in Christ we also possess a nature which is contrary to that new life; that sinful nature we were born with. This is why there is a constant struggle between doing that which pleases God according to His will and the desire to still sin. To deny this sinful aspect of our lives is to deny the effects of the curse of sin which still plagues us.

This is what Paul describes in Romans.

ROM 7:18-25 "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. (Or my flesh) For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. 21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God -through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."

Some have suggested that Paul is describing his experience before he met Christ on the road to Damascus. You'll notice, however that Paul doesn't say in verse 24, "what a wretched man I was", but "what a wretched man I am."

Paul doesn't excuse himself from his sinful choices, nor does he excuse us. But, he does encourage us to seek the only one who wants to direct us and who is able to make us walk according to His ways; God, the Holy Spirit.

Sanctification is God's will for you and it takes place on a daily basis. And it takes place as we submit to the means God has given us for our spiritual growth: the word of God, prayer, coming together as the Body of Christ for worship and fellowship.

But we must remember that sanctification is not an end in itself. Sanctification or becoming more like Christ as His children, means being equipped to serve Him faithfully. It means that we are strengthened in His power to live unto His honor and glory.

If we neglect the grace given to us to grow in Christ and we choose to live in the old nature, as opposed to living as those new creatures in Christ, we not only are not going to be effective in serving and loving Christ, we will in effect be serving the enemy and his kingdom of darkness whether we realize it or not.

If you feel that you've fallen in an area which is not pleasing to God, which dishonors Him, then let me encourage you not to lose heart. That's what the enemy wants; to make you an ineffective servant of Christ who is crippled with guilt.

Jesus say's repent which means turn in the other direction from that sin. But He also tells us in His word in 1JO 2:1-2 "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

Maybe you're just confused as to how to grow in Christ or are concerned that you're not totally surrendered to Christ in a certain area. It's no mystery. Just come to God and ask for His strength every day of your life and trust that His Holy Spirit, who dwells in you, will fill you and empower and encourage you to walk in His ways as you submit to Him. He won't let you down. Just don't let Him down by turning to the ways of the world.

Don't neglect the word or prayer or coming together with the saints who, we are told, are to encourage one another to love and good works.

Let me end with this encouragement which puts into perspective our motivation for walking in the Spirit and for understanding the importance of walking in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

ROM 6:8-13 "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."