

INTRO

Salvation: God's Love Forever

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, June 30, 2013

A Life-Long Process into Christ-likeness

The British Bible teacher Alan Redpath is quoted as having said, "The conversion of a soul is the miracle of a moment, but the manufacture of a saint is the task of a lifetime." It's that life-long process that we have been talking about over the past little while in our study of the doctrine of salvation.

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As we said last week, our salvation has a past-tense aspect in that we are delivered from the guilt of past sins by God's gracious work of "justification". By that past work, we are now completely set free from condemnation before a holy God and are declared to be brand-new creations in Christ. We also stressed that there is a future-tense aspect to our salvation in that we are assured that we will--one day--be made to share in the full glory of our Lord Jesus Christ through God's gracious work of "glorification". As a result, we will be made fit to dwell eternally in His presence and share eternally in the inheritance of His Son Jesus. Both of these are works that God alone does; and both are necessary for our salvation. Our salvation cannot be begun except by our 'justification'; and it cannot be completed except by our full 'glorification'. And as Paul says in Philippians 1:6, we can rejoice in the beginning and end of our salvation; "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ".!

But between the 'past' aspect of our salvation (our "justification") and the 'future' impact of our salvation (our "glorification"), there is also its present aspect. This 'present-tense' aspect of our salvation is brought about by what the Bible calls our "sanctification".

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In our last study, we considered what the process of sanctification involves: that it is a matter of God setting us apart as 'holy' unto Himself in what we called "positional sanctification"; but that it also involved an ongoing, day-to-day process of transformation in what we called "practical" or "progressive sanctification". We also considered who it is that does this great work of sanctifying the believer. We considered that the Holy Spirit is the one who graciously 'sanctifies' us--getting rid of the sin in our lives and enabling us to live more like the Lord Jesus. But we also stressed that we ourselves are to cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit by our ongoing trust in Jesus' blood, by our ongoing study of God's word, by consistently presenting our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness, and by allowing the the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit in us through our step-by-step obedience to Him.

In today's study, we carry the subject of our sanctification a little further by considering . . .

I. HOW LONG THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION GOES ON.

- A. There's a sense in which the process of our sanctification has its beginning point before creation. The Bible tells us that the Father chose the redeemed in Christ "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). King David praised God by saying, "in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them"

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(Psalm 139:16). We truly are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). From the standpoint of our “positional” sanctification, then, we can say that our sanctification began in the sovereign purposes of God before time; and that we were set apart as His from the foundation of the world.

- B. But from the standpoint of our “practical” sanctification--that is, the process of our being progressively ‘sanctified’ in Christ in everyday experience--our sanctification began at the point of our justification. The moment we believe on the Lord Jesus, the process in us was begun. A very vivid description of our sanctification is given to us in 2 Peter 1. In verses 5-8, we’re told about the process that begins from the foundation of “faith in Christ”. Peter writes; “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And Peter then shows that this process is rooted deeply in the beginning point of justification when he goes on to say, “For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins” (v. 9). This process is to be consciously carried on by the believer to the very end. Peter went on to say, “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (vv. 10-11).
- C. It’s a joy to walk with Jesus. But the process of our growth in Him seems arduous and unending. Sometimes we may wonder if we’re making any progress. Sometimes we may wonder when the hard work of it all will end. But praise God--we *are* making progress, and it *does* end! The process of growth ends at the point of glorification. Our full glorification means that we will be like Jesus. As John puts it, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). This doesn’t mean, of course, that we should simply kick-back passively and wait for glorification. John adds, “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (v. 3). Obviously, when our glorification happens, there is nothing more of sin in us that needs to be removed. Our perfection in Christ will be complete. What a wonderful thing to finally be among “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:23)! But now--while we still abide in this fallen world--we should never give up. We should rejoice in the way that each new step forward is used by God to make us more in practice like what He declares us to be in position. We should say, like Paul, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Philippians 3:12).

II. WHAT THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION RESULTS IN.

- A. Our ultimate destiny is to be fully conformed to the image of Christ. That’s best understood as the result of ‘glorification’. But there are also present results that come from our progress in sanctification. One is that of living a life that pleases God. As it says in Titus 2:11-14; “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly,

righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” One of the benefits of our progressive sanctification is that we grow increasingly in that which God saved us for--holiness, here and now. It’s for such practical holiness that He has redeemed us. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification . . .” (1 Thessalonians 4:3a).

- B. Another result--perhaps another way of saying that we grow in holiness--is growth into the image of Christ Himself in daily practice. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” That’s not speaking strictly of our conformity to Christ in future glory, but of our conformity to Him here and now, in daily living. “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6).

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One of the most beautiful passages concerning our progressive sanctification--and on how much it means to the Lord Jesus Himself--is found in John 15:1-5; “I am the true vine,” He said, “and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

May God help us to abide in Him--and thus bear much fruit.

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from The Holy Bible, New King James Version; copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc.