

Sanctification

Sanctification is God's act of making us holy.

In its corporate sense, sanctification refers to the **holiness** of the people of God. **Israel** and the church become a holy people through God's act of **election**. In election God creates this people and distinguishes and separates them from the rest of the world. This act of election constitutes Israel and the **church** as a *holy* people, separated from the world and separated to God. To belong to the church is thus to share in the church's corporate holiness as the body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit.

In its individual sense, sanctification is attained in acts of consecration (or devotion). Both people (such as Nazarites) and things (such as the **temple**) can be consecrated to God. They thereby belong to God and are no longer available for ordinary use but instead can be used only in the service of God. In the New Testament, our entire self, including the body, is to be consecrated to God.

People and things consecrated to God must avoid the state of impurity; only what is pure can have access to God. Impurity originally consisted in avoiding contact with blood, corpses and other defiling things. Increasingly, however, biblical writers regarded impurity in terms of idolatry and fornication. Purity thus came to have a moral dimension.

Being part of the holy people of God requires **righteousness** and holy conduct, above all love for God and neighbor. Some deeds are thus specifically demanded of God's people. At the same time, some deeds are inconsistent with holiness. Sanctification is, accordingly, not only separation to God but also separation from sin and the pursuit of righteousness.

Sin has a two-fold sense. Outward sin consists in wicked deeds such as murder and theft. Inward sin (sometimes referred to as concupiscence, corruption or depravity) consists in evil thoughts and desires, such as envy, anger and greed. Every disciple is able, with God's grace, to avoid outward sin; inward sin, however, requires a deeper act of divine grace. Sanctification is this deeper act.

Sanctification has three phases. *Initial* sanctification is the first movement of God's grace as it begins to overcome inward sin. *Progressive* sanctification is the ongoing work by which grace helps us daily to become more and more free from inward sin. *Entire* **sanctification** signifies the final victory over sin, the moment when inward sin no longer affects us and we are instead filled with perfect love for God. This phase of sanctification corresponds to the idea of **theosis** or **deification** as described in mystical theology.

Sanctification is not, however, the complete solution to humankind's problems. While it recreates us according to the *moral* image of God (righteousness and holiness), it does not erase all the effects of sin, especially those affecting the *natural* image of God. Entire sanctification thus leaves us with impaired judgment and understanding and the resulting infirmities inevitably affect our conduct. So, while our love may be pure, our deeds may be flawed. Consequently, the life of sanctification continues to be a life of humility and repentance.

While sanctification is a work of God's grace, humans cooperate with this grace in acts of **self-denial** (mortification), in **acts of mercy**, and by participating in the **means of grace**. Self-denial is

necessary because sin clings stubbornly to our bodily existence and desire. Acts of mercy promote sanctification by helping us grow in Christian virtue. Finally, sharing in the mean of grace furthers sanctification by incorporating more and more into Christ.