

CHAPTER 11.

SANCTIFICATION

One sweltering summer afternoon, two mothers, Susan and Jane, sat together on the deck in the backyard. Their children, four from each family for a total of eight, ran through the sprinkler and jumped in and out of the kiddie pool, thoroughly enjoying their time with each other. The children's preoccupation with spraying and splashing water also gave Susan and Jane time to talk. After a while their conversation drifted back to a Bible study discussion they had been involved in a couple of months ago.

Why don't Christians live more consistently holy lives? That had been the question at that particular study session. After all, gossip is a problem in the church just as much as it is in society as a whole—maybe even more so. There are marriage breakups both beyond and within the walls of the church. Outbursts of anger, temptations from pornography, abuse of alcohol: all of these things are found in Christian families, too. At times it can be so disheartening. Why do God's people often fail so miserably to live pure and honourable lives?

For her part, Susan wondered aloud, "Maybe it's because we're too easy on ourselves. Maybe with all the preaching about forgiveness we just don't worry too much about sinning because we know we can always go back for more forgiveness."

Jane responded, "You might be right. But it could be something else as well. Maybe we're just too comfortable with the idea that we are God's

children. Think about. If one of our children does something wrong, we might get upset at them, but deep down our children know that we're still going to keep on loving them, no matter what. Maybe that's why we don't put more effort into avoiding sin. In the back of our minds, we're still thinking that sin is not such a big problem because God's going to keep on loving us, no matter what."

To this Susan replied, "Or . . . like so many things in life, perhaps it's a bit of both." "Yes, perhaps," agreed Jane.

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This short, fictional anecdote illustrates the importance of pinpointing the right relationship between justification and adoption, which we dealt with in the last chapter, and sanctification, which we will explore in this chapter. If the Eternal Judge sets us free from the punishment we deserve and the Almighty Father has adopted us as his children, it would seem like we are spiritually set. To be sure, sin should be avoided as much as possible, but the urgency for holy living appears to fade away. After all, the Judge has pardoned us and the Father still loves us.

This concern is aptly captured by Question 64 of the Heidelberg Catechism, "Does this teaching [of justification, but also adoption] not make people careless and wicked?" Or as the apostle Paul put it, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Rom 6:1) His answer, perhaps surprising to some, is: "By no means!" The clarion call of the Lord is unmistakable. "For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you" (1 Thess 4:7–8).

Justification and sanctification are two distinct blessings that both belong in our lives precisely because the God who graciously justifies is the one who also steadfastly sanctifies. The Catechism expresses the same truth in these words, "Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit," and it is for this reason that a godly walk of life is a *must* not a *may* or a *maybe* (LD 32, Q&A 86). Thinking back to the order of salvation, we can say it in this way: justification is God's

declaration of pardon *concerning us* and sanctification is God's work of renewal *within us*. Since much sinfulness lingers in our lives, that journey of renewal will be far from easy. In fact, it will be impossible unless the Holy Spirit is at work within us. In a word, this renewal, accomplished by the Spirit of Christ, is called sanctification.

“YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY” (1 PET 1:16)

Sanctification is just as theocentric, or God-centred, as justification. In Scripture the LORD is often described as holy (Lev 11:44, 45; Josh 24:19; 1 Sam 2:2; Pss 29:2; 78:41; 99:3, 5, 9). In the well-known passage from Isaiah, we even hear the angels calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” (6:3). To the minds of many, God's holiness is the same as his sinlessness. Of course, it is true that God is without sin, but in the first place, to be holy means to be set apart. This root meaning is expressed well by the LORD himself when he asks, “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One” (Isa 40:25). The point is this: God is in a separate category, all of his own. He is distinct and different from all creatures. You cannot compare him to the stars, for even the heavens are not vast enough to contain him (1 Kgs 8:27). You certainly cannot compare him with the other, false gods, because they are all a lie (Isa 44:20) and he is the truth (Isa 65:16). Thus, God is unique, unequalled, and incomparable; he is, as the prophet says, *the Holy One*. Flowing from this is the additional truth that he is free from all sins. In distinction from sinful human beings and rebellious demons, the LORD alone is perfectly flawless in all that he says and does (Ps 18:30; Prov 30:5). However, as we move forward in the doctrine of sanctification it is helpful to keep this order in mind: God is first of all holy in *who he is* and then, flowing from that, also in *what he does*.

As quoted in the title of this section, the Lord commands us to be holy because he is holy. This command is taken directly from the book of Leviticus where it occurs a number of times (Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7). Clearly, there is to be a correspondence between who God is and who his people are. Just as he is holy, so also they should be holy. Against the

background of Paradise, this makes perfect sense. In the beginning God created Adam and Eve in his image and likeness (Gen 1:26–27). The word *likeness* further explains what the image really is. In the Garden of Eden, there were noteworthy similarities between God and our first parents. The heavenly Father was righteous, and so were his first two children, Adam and Eve. The Father was loving, and so were his children. The Father was holy, and so were his children. As the Catechism says, “God created man good and in his image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness” (LD 3, Q&A 6).

Obviously, sin utterly ruined the likeness between God and human beings. Adam, Eve, and all their descendants became sinful and hateful instead of righteous and holy. However, through God’s gift of adoption, a sinful human being becomes a child of God (Rom 8:16, 17). Therefore, it follows that the image and likeness of God must also be recreated within that person. Not only will a redeemed sinner be called a child of God, he must also conduct himself as a child of God. The newly adopted child must learn to love and to live just like the heavenly Father who has adopted him. So, the command to be holy because God is holy fits very well within the family-centred context of our adoption as God’s children.

In this respect, it is instructive that the Catechism speaks about being renewed in God’s image both in Lord’s Day 32 and again in Lord’s Day 44. Lord’s Day 32, Q&A 86 begins a new section on thankfulness and it introduces the whole matter of “our godly walk of life.” It does so by referring to Christ who “renews us by his Holy Spirit to be his image.” This godly lifestyle is then described in detail as the Catechism works through each of the Ten Commandments in Lord’s Days 34–44. Finally, after the tenth commandment has been explained, the Catechism comes back to the matter of being renewed, encouraging all Christians to pray earnestly “to be renewed more and more after God’s image” (Q&A 115). These two references to renewal in God’s image stand like bookends at the beginning and the end of the Catechism’s treatment of the sanctification of our lives in accordance with God’s law. This is an unmistakable reminder that sanctification is much more than merely morality. Morality focuses on doing what is good rather than evil. Sanctification

includes that, but it is a far larger miracle in which the Spirit of God renews the entire child of God—his thoughts, desires, attitudes, words, and actions—to be, more and more, in the likeness of the eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This broader meaning of sanctification is already revealed, at least in an initial way, in the Old Testament. The noun *holiness* or the verb *to make holy* is not restricted to situations of doing good, as opposed to doing evil. For example, in Exodus we read about the special garments that the skilled craftsmen had to make for Aaron the high priest. These beautiful clothes were “to consecrate him,” or literally, “for making him holy,” or “sanctifying him” (Exod 28:3). Of course, these clothes, as such, could not make Aaron follow God’s commands and live a moral life. Rather, they set him apart from the rest of the people, and even from the rest of his fellow priests. There was only one man in Israel who wore that particular set of clothes, and that was the high priest. Similarly, the Sabbath day was designated to be a holy day (Exod 20:8, 11). This does not mean that the Sabbath day is good whereas the other six days of work are bad. Not at all! Work is also good in the eyes of God (2 Thess 3:10). However, in the fourth commandment the LORD sets the Sabbath day off into a category that is different than other six days.

This consecration, or setting apart, is applied in various different ways. In the first place, out of all the different nations living on the earth, the LORD chose Israel to be “his treasured possession”; thus, they became “a people holy to the LORD your God” (Deut 7:6; see also Exod 19:6). The expression “holy to the LORD” indicates yet another aspect of holiness. Not only is the holy nation separated from the other nations (the negative aspect), but this holy nation is to be dedicated, loyal, and devout to the LORD (the positive aspect). Moreover, this dedication to the LORD is concretely expressed by obeying his commands. For instance, holiness and obedience are brought together in Leviticus 20:8, which reads, “Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.”

At the same time, within the holy nation of Israel, there is a further consecration of the priests who are distinguished from the rest of the

Israelites in order to devote their lives to serving the LORD by offering sacrifices and guiding God's people in worship (Exod 28:41; 40:13; Lev 8:10). These specially consecrated priests are to serve at a specially consecrated place, namely, the holy tabernacle and, later, the holy temple. That place was also set apart from all other places as the location that was dedicated for worship (Exod 29:43–44; Deut 12:4–5; Pss 24:3; 46:4). Since the holy temple was the LORD's own personal home (Ps 84:1, 10), all those entering his courts should conduct themselves in a manner pleasing to their divine Host. This is where the moral aspect of holiness comes back into the picture. Since God's holy people and God's holy priests are dedicated to him, they must be careful to do only the things of which he approves. Therefore, in sanctified living the deep desire driving our daily deeds is not, in the first place, "it is a good thing to do," but rather, "it is a God-pleasing thing to do."

THE HOLY ONE AND OUR SANCTIFICATION

All of this reaches a new height of fulfillment in Jesus Christ who was born as the Holy One (Luke 1:35). Not only is Jesus Christ the eternal High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:6), but he is the embodiment of God's holy temple (John 2:19–21). His entire life was devoted to doing his Father's work (John 5:17; 6:27; 14:10). His Father's honour was paramount in his heart, even to the point that he took drastic action to cleanse his Father's holy temple from unclean, money-loving businessmen (John 2:13–17). Indeed, toward the end of his life on earth, before he went to the cross, he said to the Father, "I consecrate myself" for the sake of the disciples (John 17:19). This unique expression, "I consecrate myself," is a powerful expression of just how "holy, innocent, unstained, [and] separated from sinners" this High Priest, really is (Heb 7:26). Also of Christ the angels could certainly sing, "Holy, holy, holy."

Yet this holiness of the Christ has a redemptive purpose, too. Also his holiness is graciously imputed to us, through faith. The apostle Paul writes that Christ is our "righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30). Just as surely as Christ's righteousness is given to us to cover over our all our transgressions (i.e., justification), so certainly

Christ's holiness is given to cover over all our uncleanness (i.e., sanctification). As Lord's Day 23 says, God imputes to us "the perfect satisfaction, righteous, and *holiness* of Christ" (Q&A 60).

In Christ and as members of the new covenant, God's people today are not only a "holy nation" (1 Pet 1:9), but also a "holy priesthood" (1 Pet 2:5) and "a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19). In other words, the three entities that were entities in the OT—holy nation, holy priesthood, and holy temple—are now fulfilled and concentrated, through Christ, in the lives of all Christians. Since each Christian is part of the holy nation, priesthood, and temple, there is a triple-strong motivation to pursue a godly walk of life out of dedication to the LORD. In the NT God's people do not go to the house of the LORD; there *are* the house of the LORD. Therefore, the call is all the more urgent: "You shall be holy for I am holy."

This sanctification is also closely related to repentance, or the turning around on the path of life to shun iniquity and follow the Lord instead. On the one side, there is a running away from sin and everything that entices to sin (1 Cor 6:18; 10:14; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22). Sometimes this is called mortification, or crucifying the old, sinful nature. Then, on the other side, there is pursuing everything that pleases God, in accordance with his commands (1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22). Sometimes this is called vivification. The Catechism uses more familiar terms when it speaks of the "dying of the old nature" and the "coming to life of the new" (LD 33).

"MAY GOD HIMSELF SANCTIFY YOU" (1 THESS 5:23)

We have now established the basic meaning of sanctification. It is the ongoing process by which someone becomes more and more consecrated unto the Lord, fleeing from all sin and delighting in all good works. Yet who does this work of sanctification? In Scripture there are many commands related to sanctification: "Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Cor 6:18), "be holy" (1 Pet 1:16), "pursue righteousness" (1 Tim 6:11), and "abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess 5:22). From the frequency of

such commands, it would be easy to conclude that we have, at least in part, the ability to sanctify ourselves. In short, the logic of the argument runs something like this: “If God commands us to do it, we must be able to do it. If we cannot do it, why would he even give us the command in the first place?”

However, this argument runs up against the truth of Scripture in which God reveals that the sinful mind “does not submit to God’s law; indeed, *cannot*” (Rom 8:7; emphasis added). In addition, “Those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God” (Rom 8:8; emphasis added). Please notice that the apostle Paul not only speaks about reality, that is, what people do, but also of capacity, that is, what they are able to do. The conclusion is clear. In and of themselves, human beings do not have the ability to please God. Yet that is what sanctification is all about: pleasing the God who has consecrated you to serve him. Therefore, contrary to common opinion, we must maintain that only God the Holy Spirit has the almighty power, wisdom, and persistence needed to sanctify a sinner. No wonder, then, that the apostle Paul prays, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely . . . he who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thess 5:23, 24).

At the same time, sanctification is a work of our Triune God. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, certainly has a central role to play. Not only are we “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” but we are also washed and sanctified in that same name of our Saviour (1 Cor 6:11). Indeed, he is the one who sanctifies us (Heb 2:11). Christ is both the basis of our sanctification (1 Cor 1:30; Heb 10:10) and the author of our sanctification through his blood and the sacrifice on the cross (Heb 10:10; 13:12). Christ does this through his Spirit. Numerous Scripture passages highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification (1 Cor 6:11; Gal 5:22; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2). After all, who better to work holiness in our lives than the *Holy* Spirit himself? The Catechism ties it all together when it says, “Christ . . . also renews us by his Holy Spirit to be his image” (LD 32, Q&A 86).

Not surprisingly, the Spirit of Christ does not sanctify us mystically but rather through certain means. Again, not surprisingly, the Word of God is the primary means through which the Spirit of God works his miracle of sanctification. It is striking that when our Saviour prayed his high-priestly prayer, he joined sanctification and the Word of truth when he said, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). The little word *in* indicates the truth is the instrument through which sanctification is accomplished. Jesus offered up this petition not only for his disciples at the Last Supper, but also for all “those who will believe in me through their word” (John 17:20). Thus, all those commands to avoid sin and pursue righteousness, found in the Word of truth, are the means by which the Spirit works sanctification in the lives of God’s children. These commands do not indicate that sanctification is man’s work. Instead, they are the means by which God works in us.

Added to that, since the Spirit of Christ is sanctifying our hearts and minds, we certainly do desire to be devoted to the Lord and delight in obeying him. The Spirit of sanctification is renewing real human beings in the image of God; he is not re-programming robots. Thus, we are active within the process of sanctification, but we are not the author of it. We are the ones who heed the command to live a godly life, but only because the Spirit of God enables us to submit to those instructions.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

When it comes to the doctrine of sanctification, some common errors seem to linger tenaciously within the church. The first is a confusion of justification and sanctification. We already touched on this briefly in the last chapter. Now it is fitting to go into more detail. The Roman Catholic Church teaches a kind of initial sanctification, often called infused righteousness, which becomes the basis for our justification. In addition, this church teaches that justification can be increased.¹ In this way, increasing justification starts to sound very similar to the ongoing process of

1. Denzinger, Henry, and Karl Rahner, eds. *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1954), 253.

sanctification. The net result is that justification and sanctification are blended together. Even worse, salvation easily becomes a joint effort between God and us, with each party contributing his own efforts to the cause.

Justification and sanctification cannot be completely disconnected from each other. Scripture would not allow that since we are both justified and sanctified in the same name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the same Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:11). Still, even though they should not be disconnected, they should remain distinct. Perhaps an analogy will help make the distinction clear. Let us say that there is a terrible criminal, a young man guilty of many offences, who is awaiting his trial in court. When he finally appears in court, and all the evidence is laid out before the judge, the matter is indisputable: this man is guilty and should be punished. However, the judge decides to grant this criminal a pardon. He does not deserve it, but the judge graciously grants it. In his parting comments to this recently acquitted criminal, the judge says, "And now, young man, spend the rest of your life working hard and being productive. Stay away from your old, criminal friends. Respect the laws of the land. Be kind and helpful toward others." Of course, how this young man actually lives the rest of his life remains to be seen. There is a close connection between his day in court and the rest of his life. However, it is also clear that the outcome of his trial and the remainder of his life are not the same thing.

In a somewhat comparable way, we can distinguish justification and sanctification. Justification is like our day in court. The Judge graciously pardons us, acquitting us from all our spiritual crimes and releasing us from the punishment that we deserve. Sanctification refers to how we live the rest of our lives, now that we have been freed. Of course, all analogies are limited. The judge in our analogy has no direct control over what the acquitted criminal does with the rest of his life. However, the Judge in heaven, who through his Spirit is our Sanctifier, does have a direct, divine hand in how we live the rest of our lives. Still, the basic point remains: sanctification is something that flows forth from justifica-

tion. It is not part of justification itself, let alone the basis upon which we are justified.

GOOD WORKS CLEARLY DEFINED

There is a second problem, also linked to sanctification, which often surfaces in discussions. It has to do with this question: how do we know which works are really good works? To be sure, the Catechism emphasizes that we *must* do good works (LD 32, Q 86). Here the Catechism is only echoing the apostle Paul who says that we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 2:10), and we ought to be “ready for every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). But who defines what a good work is? Where do we find that definition? Are good works defined by our own gut feelings? Is it enough to have some sense that “this is the right thing to do”? The Canons of Dort call this the light of nature whereby all people have some sense of the “difference between what is honourable and shameful” (3/4.4).

However, our conscience is not a reliable guide for determining good because the light of nature not only accuses us of wrongdoing but also at times makes up excuses for our misdeeds (Rom 2:15). In this way our conscience is like the double agent of our spiritual life. Furthermore, there may be a consensus in society that it is good to give money to charity, to assist the afflicted, and to help the aged. However, the Lord looks deeper than our actions; he looks into our hearts and especially our motives (1 Chron 28:9; Prov 16:2). Perhaps most importantly, if we are speaking about doing good works as part of our sanctification, then those good works are not truly good until they are done out of loyalty to the Lord. After all, that is what sanctification is really all about. It is not just a matter of doing good and avoiding evil—in and of itself. It is a matter of being set apart and dedicated to the Lord’s service, as a holy nation and priesthood.

In short, if any work is to be truly good, then it must be done for God. With this in mind, the Catechism gives a rather stringent definition of good works in Q&A 91. It reads, “But what are good works? Only those which are done out of true faith, in accordance with the law of God, and

to his glory, and not those based on our own opinion or on the precepts of men.” As part of our own sanctification, we should be aware that many things that the world will call a “good deed,” the Lord does not call a good deed. Beyond that, there may even be things that Christians call “good deeds,” which the Lord himself would not categorize as a good deed. Out of faith, according to God’s law, and to his glory: all three of these must be met before any deed qualifies, in God’s sight, as a good work.

A SMALL YET EARNEST BEGINNING

The third, final, and most common problem with sanctification relates to progress or the apparent lack thereof. There is an historical background to this discussion. Already in the early church, there were monks, nuns, and others who lived an ascetic lifestyle. They turned their back on wealth, fancy clothes, rich foods, and many other creature comforts. They also did not marry. Many of them removed themselves from the regular hustle and bustle of city and commerce. Instead, they lived off by themselves in some sort of commune. In this way, they thought that they would be able to live a more holy life. Indeed, according to the Roman Catholic Church, some of these people were so successful in their single-minded devotion to holy living that they were worthy to be called saints. The Eastern Orthodox Church has also chosen various people to be saints. Between these two churches, literally hundreds of individuals have been set aside in the special, elevated category of sainthood. This raises a question: is it possible for certain people to achieve such a high degree of sanctification that they deserve to receive a special title?

A different, but still related, teaching is the idea that, at some point after conversion, a person may receive a second blessing, which is called complete or entire sanctification. In chapter 7 we learned that this is especially common in Methodist, Pentecostal, and charismatic circles. However, it can find its way into almost any church, sometimes under the guise of what is called “victorious Christian living.” In short, the idea is that if someone really focuses on living a holy life, strenuously avoiding all temptation and fervently praying for God’s help, he can reach the

point in his sanctification that he is victorious over sin and completely, or at least almost completely, sanctified. Such a “victorious Christian” has obtained a much higher degree of sanctification than is common among other believers.

What does the Lord say about such teachings? In the first place, it is simply wrong to assert that someone can reach a stage in his life when he no longer sins. In fact, the Holy Spirit, through the apostle John, says that such an idea is a lie. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). At the dedication of the temple, King Solomon already confessed this truth when he said, “there is no one who does not sin” (1 Kgs 8:46). In addition, if there was ever a man who was devoted to the Lord, it must have been the apostle Paul. Yet, concerning himself, he said, “the evil I do not want to do is what I keep on doing . . . what a wretched man I am!” (Rom 7:19, 24). If Paul did not arrive at the stage of being free from sin in his life, who will dare claim a higher degree of sanctification than that beloved apostle?

It can also be questioned whether living in seclusion really promotes true sanctification. In the first place, Jesus taught that sin wells up from inside the heart (Matt 15:19). Whether a sinful heart is in the city square or tucked away in a monastery, it is still a corrupt heart from which “sin continually streams forth like water welling up from this woeful source” (BC 15). To be sure, God’s people should not willfully expose themselves to temptation. Part of sanctification is fleeing immorality, not flirting with it. At the same time, it is noteworthy that at the very moment that Jesus prayed for the sanctification of his followers, he also prayed that his Father would leave them in this world, but protect them from Satan. To be precise, he said, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:15–18). In other words, sanctification does not happen by removing oneself from the world but by living in the midst of this world according to the Word of truth. God’s holy people are not like

lamps hidden under the shadow of a basket but like stars shining in the midst of this dark universe (Matt 5:15, 16; Phil 2:15).

Sometimes those who promote the idea of complete sanctification seek support in the first letter of John. For example, in 1 John 3:6, the apostle writes, “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning.” Similar verses can be found in 1 John 3:9 and 5:18. However, it is impossible that these verses teach that believers can reach a stage of sinlessness in this life because earlier in this letter the very same apostle wrote, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Rather the apostle is saying that those who truly believe in God will not carelessly and callously continue sinning, as if nothing was wrong. Rather they will feel a godly sorrow for how they have offended God, and “although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life” (BC 29).

Therefore, the Catechism is both scriptural and realistic when it says that “in this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience” (LD 44, Q&A 114). Some of God’s people struggle more with one sin while others wrestle with another temptation. Still, all Christians—both recent converts and experienced believers—have much more room for growth in sanctification. The apostle Paul says it well with these words: “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil 3:12). The Catechism puts it this way: “Nevertheless, with earnest purpose they do begin to live not only according to some but to all the commandments of God” (LD 44, Q&A 44). All of us must pray, right until our dying day, that the Spirit of Christ would continue to renew us more and more until *after* this life—not during this life—we reach the goal of perfection (LD 44, Q&A 45).

In conclusion, within the Church it is important that both the free pardon from sin and the call to holy living are preached earnestly. The distinct doctrines of justification and sanctification must sound forth, with equal fervour, from the pulpits of our churches. Sometimes, out of passion and compassion, a pastor can proclaim full and free forgiveness but avoid

exhortations to holy living. After all, who wants to tell people that they need to mend their crooked ways? However, the preacher who steers around sanctification issues runs the risk of guiding his flock into easy believism, and worse, dishonouring the Christ who not only redeems but also renews.

Other times, out of zeal to see more holiness in the lives of fellow believers, preachers can overemphasize sanctification to the point of leading their congregations back into the quagmire of salvation by works. Salvation by works is a pit out of which no one can climb. This false teaching is like doctrinal quicksand. Those who stand in it only sink deeper and deeper. The warning of the Belgic Confession is still pertinent today:

Furthermore, although we do good works, we do not base our salvation on them. We cannot do a single work that is not defiled by our flesh and does not deserve punishment. Even if we could show one good work, the remembrance of one sin is enough to make God reject it. We would then always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be constantly tormented, if they did not rely on the merit of the death and passion of our Saviour (Art. 24).

Suggested Reading: Romans 8:1–11

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. This chapter identified a threefold link between our creation in God's image, our sanctification, and Christ as the Son of God. Explore how Romans 8:29 speaks about this link. Also, discuss how this link helps to prevent holy living from becoming a long list of do's and don'ts.
2. Is holiness in the OT more ceremonial while holiness in the NT is more ethical? In connection with this, in the OT God's people went to the holy temple (Ps 5:7) whereas in the NT God's people *are* the holy temple (1 Cor 3:17; Eph 2:21). Does that change the way we think about sanctification in any significant way?
3. Identify two main differences between justification and sanctification. Also, identify one key connecting point between justification and sanctification.

4. A multimillionaire is featured in the newspaper for donating one million dollars toward a new cancer ward in the local hospital. He is also chairman of an aggressive pro-homosexuality group and has spoken against the Christian church on various occasions. Can we still call his generous donation a good work? Perhaps in a qualified sense? Or not at all?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. Consider the following opinion: “I think the church today needs less emphasis on forgiveness of sins and more emphasis on fleeing from sin. People love cheap grace. But in the end, if we keep preaching forgiveness, we end up with a church full of people who don’t care if they sin because in the back of their minds they always know where to find forgiveness.” Evaluate this opinion using both Scripture and the confessions. In a respectful and constructive way, discuss the preaching in your own congregation and explore ways to maintain the proper emphasis on both justification and sanctification.
2. A member in the congregation joyfully announces, “When I look back on my life with the Lord in the past year, I can thankfully conclude that I am more sanctified now than I was a year ago.” Is it correct to be speaking like this? How would we realistically measure “more sanctified”?
3. One of the challenges in sanctification is that different church members have different ideas on what constitutes holy living. For example, everyone will agree that blasphemy is wrong. Yet some Christians will read books and watch movies that contain blasphemy while others will say that then we are sharing in this horrible sin by being silent bystanders (LD 36). Things become even more complicated when parents are trying to raise children who raise questions about why their friends in church can watch a certain movie while they are not allowed to do so. How do we handle this in a biblical and edifying way?