



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 12.1 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

Sanctification: Broad Sense and Narrow Sense

The entire work of the Holy Spirit can be called “sanctification”. This includes the initial work of the Holy Spirit in conversion through the means of grace, as well as the production of the fruits of faith and preservation of faith to the end. The Bible sometimes uses the word “sanctification” in this broad sense. For example, the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica: **“We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). In a similar way the apostle Peter calls his readers **“elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”** (1 Peter 1:2).

But in this chapter, we will concentrate on only one phase of the Holy Spirit’s entire work of sanctification. We will be using the word “sanctification” in the narrow sense, which refers only to the work of the Holy Spirit that enables those who are already believers in Christ to live Christian lives and to grow in holiness. For this purpose, the Holy Spirit uses the same means He uses to create faith in Christ, namely, the Gospel in word and sacrament. The Bible sometimes uses the word “sanctification” in this narrow sense. For example, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: **“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality”** (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Here the apostle is speaking of sanctification in connection with the living of a moral and godly life in contrast to the immoral lives of the heathen.

Many of the letters of the apostle Paul are divided into two sections. The first part presents the basic teaching of the Gospel; the second part generally presents the effect the Gospel should have on our lives, that is, sanctification. For example, Galatians 1-4 concentrates on the doctrine of justification by faith, but the last two chapters (5-6) emphasize **“the fruit of the Spirit”** (Galatians 5:22). The first three chapters of Ephesians stress the love of God and the work of Christ for believers, whereas the last three chapters encourage the Christians **“to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called”** (Ephesians 4:1).

Paul follows this same pattern in his letter to the Romans, explaining the Gospel in great depth in chapters 1-11, and then he begins the last section of his letter (chapters 12-16) with this encouragement to live a Christian life of sanctification: **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”** (Romans 12:1-2).

A good summary of sanctification in the narrow sense is presented in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians: **“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”** (2 Corinthians 7:1). Sanctification is growth in holiness, growth in love, growth in appreciation of the Gospel that motivates the believer to live a life pleasing to God, but yet in great weakness because of the continuing presence of the sinful flesh.

Sometimes the New Testament speaks of sanctification as a renewal that begins the moment we are brought to faith in Christ. Paul writes: **“Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day”** (2 Corinthians 4:16). As we grow older, our bodies become weaker, but through the Gospel of Christ the Holy Spirit strengthens our spiritual life. **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”** (2 Corinthians 5:17). Sanctification involves putting off **“the old man”** and putting on **“the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness”** (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Questions

1. What is meant by sanctification in the broad sense?
2. What is meant by sanctification in the narrow sense?
3. Which person of the Triune God is especially concerned with sanctification?
4. What means does God use to bring about sanctification in both the broad and narrow senses?
5. Which two sections do many of Paul’s letters contain?
6. How can we present our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord?
7. What is the difference between the outward man and the inward man?
8. When does the renewal of our spiritual life begin?
9. What does a Christian put off and what does a Christian put on?