



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 12.3 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

Sanctification as the Work of the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace

The New Testament ascribes the work of sanctification (in both the broad and narrow senses) particularly to the Holy Spirit. In Peter's Trinitarian greeting, he speaks of the foreknowledge of the Father, the blood of the Son, and "**sanctification of the Spirit**" (1 Peter 1:2). The apostle Paul likewise speaks of "**sanctification by the Spirit**" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). In his letter to the Galatians Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with "**the fruit of the Spirit**" and lists as such fruit godly attitudes and emotions such as "**love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control**" (Galatians 5:22-23). These things certainly describe a sanctified life.

The Holy Spirit actually dwells within the Christian. Paul told the Christians in Corinth: "**Do you not know that you (plural) are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?**" (1 Corinthians 3:16). He repeated this truth a bit later when he wrote: "**Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's**" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This work of the Holy Spirit within us is necessary, for Paul explains: "**You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ... For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God**" (Romans 8:9, 13-14).

But the Father and the Son are also named as participants in the work of sanctification, and sometimes the work is simply ascribed to God. The writer to the Hebrews concludes his letter with this prayer: "**Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever**" (Hebrews 13:20-21). The work of sanctification is described here as the work of God in making us complete in every good work, and in working in the Christian that which pleases Him. In his letter to Titus Paul ascribes the work of sanctification to Jesus Himself by saying: He "**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**" (Titus 2:14). Also, in his letter to the Ephesians Paul speaks of Christ as the Sanctifier: "**Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word**" (Ephesians 5:25-26).

As the Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to strengthen our faith in Christ, He is at the same time strengthening us in our desire to live a life that is pleasing to God. Notice how Paul motivates the Christian life of the Christians in Rome by appealing to God's mercies, which center in the Gospel: "**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God**" (Romans 12:1). Likewise in his second letter to the Corinthians, he presents the promises of God in Christ as the motivation for living the Christian life: "**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).

To the Christians in Colossae Paul reminds them of the Gospel by calling them "**the elect of God, holy and beloved**", and then he continues by encouraging them to "**put on tender mercies, kindness,**

humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another” (Colossians 3:12-13).

Notice that the Holy Spirit does not strengthen our faith in Christ by means of the law, nor does He try to motivate us to live the Christian life by means of the law. Christian pastors in this New Testament age are **“ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”** (2 Corinthians 3:6). The Spirit gives life through the Gospel. The Spirit uses the law to make us aware of our sin and our inability to save ourselves. The law with all its commands, threats, and promises cannot produce or motivate a single good work. If we are forced to do a work by the law, it cannot be a good work, because a good work is a work that is done out of faith in Christ and out of love for Him who loved us first. **“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin”** (Romans 8:2-3).

In chapter 18 we will consider in greater depth how the Holy Spirit uses the law as a mirror to show us our sin, as a curb on unbelievers and on the sinful flesh of believers, and as a standard for the Christian to know which works please God and which works displease Him. Christians still need the law in these three ways because of the sinful flesh, which remains with us until death. But it is the Gospel that the Holy Spirit uses to strengthen our faith in Christ and to motivate the living of the Christian life.

Questions

1. Which Person of the Triune God is known as the Sanctifier?
2. What does every Christian have living in his body?
3. How does the Holy Spirit motivate Christians to do good works?
4. Give some examples from the letters of Paul to explain your answer to question 3.
5. Why does the Holy Spirit use the Gospel, rather than the law, to motivate Christians to do good works?
6. What are the three uses of the law mentioned in this lesson?