

Westminster Confession

CHAPTER XIII....Of Sanctification.

I. They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened, in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

II. This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life: there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

III. In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome: and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

[**added in Baptist Confession 1689**... pressing after an heavenly life, in Evangelical Obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in his Word hath prescribed to them.]

Shaan Sloan....The Westminster and LBCF 1689 obviously emphasize God's role as *primary* in Sanctification to which we would entirely agree. However, to say that man in no way participates in this process is to deny a fundamental element of Sanctification, and, this is an error of *serious* nature and can lead to the heresies present in Antinomianism. Consider how the WCF states that "*This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life: there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh*" Thus our participation in the "war", and also the corruption involved obviously speaks to our sinful struggle against the Word and Spirit [our cooperation or lack thereof].

The whole thrust of practical Christian teaching and doctrine is to sanctify us, as we, in obedience to Scripture carry out its imperatives. It is crystal clear that Christians will "by degree" either conform or not conform to biblical doctrine, and, to the "degree" that they conform they become "like Christ" in practice and therefore are "sanctified" to a greater degree. To repeat, the whole thrust of biblical instruction in the local church is to impact this sanctification process to the greatest degree possible, also showing that sanctification happens "by degree" both corporately and personally in the lives of the believers and the corporate body. Is this not plainly evident both in Scripture and in our experience?

The Scripture demands our cooperation with God in many passages. Romans is a good example....in these context Paul is discussing the outworking of our saving faith(our practical sanctification).

Rom 6:12-14 - 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.
NASB

Rom 6:19 - 19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in *further* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. NASB

Rom 8:12-14 - 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. NASB

Rom 12:1-2 - 1 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. NASB

This in no way denies the fact that God is primary in the work of sanctification and that this is the specific ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Although this is true, and in fact we are motivated by the divine nature within us, we do have a responsibility to participate with God in the process.

In fact, the idea that God would discipline us for disobedience clearly speaks to the “our role” in the sanctification process. If we do not “cooperate” with the Word and the Spirit, God will discipline us in order to sanctify us more fully and curb our rebellion.

From my lesson on the Work of Christ

Sanctification

It is no small thing that God has “*sanctified*” those who are in Christ. Indeed for those who have come to Him, they are reckoned as “*holy and without blemish*” in **POSITION** before God. *The sacrifice of Christ has completely covered over the sin of His people and His sinless life of perfect righteousness has been imputed to their account.* Christ Jesus is a perfect priest who accomplished a perfect mediation between God and man. We can have confidence and assurance before God because of what Christ has done. Jesus has merited for us eternal salvation by His broken body and shed blood. The debt of our sins has been paid in full (redemption), our guilt has been removed (expiated), and the wrath of God on our behalf has been satisfied (propitiated).

Hebrews 10:10, 14 - 10 By this will **we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**..... 14 For by one offering **He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.** NASB

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 - 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, **who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,** 31 that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." NASB

Colossians 1:21-22 - 22 But now he has reconciled you **by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-** NASB

1 Corinthians 6:11 - 11 And such were some of you; **but you were washed, but you were sanctified,** but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. NASB

Indeed it is true that Christ Jesus died to sanctify and cleanse us from our sins and that through Him we have been justified (declared righteous). *Although we have been sanctified in **POSITION before God, the Lord is actively sanctifying us in our conduct and **PRACTICE.***** The work of salvation is continuing in those of us who are actually being saved. God is the *primary* agent in this process. We as humans are no more capable of sanctifying ourselves as we are of saving ourselves. Without the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we would be powerless against temptation and sin, continuing to trample the grace of God under our feet. This practical aspect of salvation will not be completed until the resurrection of our bodies.

Philippians 1:6 - 6 For I am confident of this very thing, **that He who began a good work in you will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus. NASB

John 17:17,19 - 17 "**Sanctify them in the truth;** Thy word is truth.....19 "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, **that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.** NASB

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 - 23 Now **may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely;** and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 **Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.** NASB

1 Corinthians 1:7-8 - 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 **who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.** NASB

Although it true that in Christ we have been justified (declared righteous), and also that God is the One who continues to sanctify us by His Spirit, nevertheless we are commanded to pursue righteousness and holiness in our conduct. We are admonished again and again to be holy and to purify ourselves by remaining in repentance. This is the practical aspect of salvation. We are to pursue Christ in our behavior and to bring honor to His name by our holy and righteous conduct. ***Therefore, sanctification is a progressive work of God in which we cooperate with God to become free from the practice of sin and progressively practice righteousness in our conduct.*** In this sense, sanctification is the work of God and the work of the believer.

Leviticus 20:26 - 26 Thus **you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy;** and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine. NASB

2 Corinthians 7:1 - Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.** NASB

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 - 3 For **this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,** 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 *and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned *you*. 7 **For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.** 8 Consequently, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. NASB

2 Peter 1:5-10 - 5 Now for this very reason also, **applying all diligence, in your faith supply** moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge; 6 and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness; 7 and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. 8 **For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** 9 For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be **all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you;** for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; NASB

2 Peter 3:14 - 14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, **be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.** NASB

1 John 3:3 - 3 And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him **purifies himself, just as He is pure.** NASB

Further, this progressive work of sanctification begins at regeneration (the moment in time when we were born again), and increases throughout our lives so that there is a decreasing practice of sinful conduct and an increasing practice of righteous conduct. We are being transformed progressively into the character and likeness (image) of Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 3:18 - 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 from the Lord, the Spirit. NASB

Romans 6:19 - 19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For **just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.** NASB

Romans 8:29 - 29 For **whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son,** that He might be the first-born among many brethren; NASB

Colossians 3:9-10 - 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, 10 and have put on **the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him** NASB

This progressive sanctification continues until death, or the resurrection (whichever happens first). At that time we will be resurrected into a completed and glorified body which is no longer subject to the corruption of sin. This is called "***Glorification.***" Sanctification continues until we die at which time we are glorified.

I have stated several times that God is the One who sanctifies His people. The position of our Church is that God is completely sovereign, in His Providence and also in

Salvation, which includes the process of Sanctification. I repeat, the position of our church is that Sanctification is the supernatural work of God which He brings about by the agency of the Word and the Spirit. This in no way negates that fact that we are commanded by God to cooperate in the process of Sanctification with Him and by His power through faith. As I stated **[in my first email on the attached document]**, God is the primary agent in Sanctification and our role is secondary.

So far **[in my previous email]**, I have quoted from the *Westminster Confession* statement on Sanctification, the *1689 London Baptist Confession* (both of which we wholeheartedly agree), and quoted over 21 different Scripture texts (with comments explaining them), and also quoted from Grudem's Systematic Theology an entire section on Sanctification in which he explains how man co-operates with God in Sanctification.

It is rather clear that you have a particular issue with expressing the human responsibility in the process of Sanctification. However this is very clear in Scripture. I will show you how this is clear in Scripture.

In Philippians 2, Paul tells **US** that **WE** are to **“work out”** our salvation because God is at work within us. Here Paul is clearly telling us to obey, cooperate, listen to, adhere to the saving process of God.

Philippians 2:12-13 - 12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation** with fear and trembling; 13 for **it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work** for His good pleasure. NASB

In Romans 8, Paul tells us that **WE** are to **“put to death the deeds of the body”** by the power of the Spirit. Is this not a call to cooperation with God in Sanctification?

Romans 8:12-14 - 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if **by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body**, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. NASB

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul tells us that God desires our Sanctification and therefore **WE** ought to **“abstain”** from sin. He reasons that since we have been called to purity and holiness that **WE** ought to **“possess our own vessel in sanctification.”** These are obvious calls to our participation and cooperation with God's Word and His Spirit in Sanctification.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 - 3 For **this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality**; 4 that each of you know how **to possess his own vessel in sanctification** and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 *and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned *you*. 7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. 8 Consequently, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. NASB

In 2 Corinthians Paul tells us that **WE** are to **“cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and Spirit,”** and also that **WE** thereby **“perfect holiness in the fear of God.”**

2 Corinthians 7:1 - Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.** NASB

In Hebrews, the Holy Spirit tells us that **WE** are to **“lay aside every encumbrance and sin,”** and with that **WE** are to **“run the race.”** Obvious calls to sanctification on our part.

Hebrews 12:1-2 - Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, **let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin** which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, NASB

Also in Hebrews, God tells us that **WE** are to **“pursue sanctification.”** This is our role in sanctification, to pursue it.

Hebrews 12:14 - 14 **Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification** without which no one will see the Lord. NASB

James tells us that **WE** are to **“Cleanse your hands”** and **“purify your hearts”** and that **WE** are to **“be miserable and mourn and weep.”** These are obvious calls for our participation and cooperation with God in Sanctification.

James 4:8-10 - 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. **Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts**, you double-minded. 9 **Be miserable and mourn and weep**; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. NASB

Peter tells us that **WE** are to **“abstain from fleshly lusts”** because they **“wage war against our souls.”** **WE** are fighting a war, by the Spirit's power, **WE** are fighting a war. In this war, Peter tells us that **WE** are to **“keep our behavior excellent”** so as to glorify God.

1 Peter 2:11-12 - 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation. NASB

Peter further tells us that **WE** are to **“be diligent to be found by Him....spotless and blameless.”** Yet another call to participation and cooperation with God in Sanctification.

2 Peter 3:14 - 14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, **be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless**, NASB

In 1 John God tells us that **WE** **“purify ourselves”** if we indeed hope in His return. Still another call to participation and cooperation with God in Sanctification.

1 John 3:3 - 3 And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him **purifies himself**, just as He is pure. NASB

In fact all the references to “putting of the flesh” in the NT are calls to this participation and cooperation with God in Sanctification.

If you are interested in learning more about what the Scripture says and what we teach about it at Heritage Christian Fellowship, we have an **audio teaching sermon on our website** where we have taught through the statement of faith. The text below is part of the handout from that sermon and is also available on our website. It can be found at the link below. In fact in this sermon we address the very text in our statement which you are questioning. I will also be teaching on these distinctions in the sanctification process this Sunday at 9:30 AM.

Sanctification is the work of God in which the believer cooperates with God in the practical outworking of his/her new birth.

SERMON

http://www.abqhcf.com/sermons/church_purpose/08-24-2005_Wednesday.mp3

HANDOUT

http://www.abqhcf.com/lessons/handouts/wednesday/HCF_Statement_of_Faith_Teaching-Salvation_Part_3_2005.pdf

Sanctification is the work of God in which the believer cooperates with God in the practical outworking of his/her new birth. - It is clear from scripture that there is a distinction to be

made in sanctification. We *have been sanctified in POSITION* before God eternally. This is why the scripture speaks of us as “holy and blameless and beyond reproach. We have had the righteousness of God imputed to our account.

Hebrews 10:10-14 - 10 By this will **we have been sanctified** through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 14 For by one offering **He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.** NASB
1 Corinthians 6:11 - 11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but **you were sanctified,** but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. NASB

Although this is true, we have not been completely sanctified PRACTICALLY in our behavior. Thus this distinction between what we call positional and practical sanctification. It is clear from scripture that we are in a PROCESS of being sanctified in our practice, in our behavior, in our daily lives. Although we have been sanctified in position before God, the Lord is actively sanctifying us in our conduct and practice.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 - 23 Now **may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame** at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. NASB

Philippians 1:6 - 6 For I am confident of this very thing, **that He who began a good work in you will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus. NASB

We are therefore exhorted in scripture to pursue holiness and sanctification. We are to purify ourselves and/or cooperate with God in this process. This is the practical aspect of salvation, we are to pursue Christ in our behavior and to bring honor to His name by our holy and righteous conduct.

Philippians 2:12-13 - 12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling;** 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. NASB

1 John 3:3 - 3 And **everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself,** just as He is pure. NASB

2 Corinthians 7:1 - 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness** in the fear of God. NASB

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 - 3 For **this is the will of God, your sanctification;** that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that **each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,** 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. 7 **For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.** 8 Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. NASB

2 Peter 3:14 - 14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, **be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.** NASB

This ongoing process of sanctification also aids in our assurance. As we see ourselves becoming like Christ in our practice, we are assured that God is working in us and see the evidence of true saving faith being born in our lives by the Holy Spirit of God. The pursuit of purity is evidence that true saving faith exists. We are not to live in a manner as to invite compromise, rather we are to pursue holiness and purity. *The one who walks in darkness and sin profanes the name of Christ and proves himself a sinner rather than a child of god.* Those who have been born of God (regenerate), walk in obedience to Christ. The New Testament clearly teaches that true saving faith gives evidence of itself through word and deed. We have been made holy by the sacrifice of Christ, it is therefore God’s will that we be sanctified in our behavior displaying the good work He has done in our hearts by our ready and willing obedience to His commands.

Romans 8:12-14 - 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13 for **if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.** 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. NASB

1 John 1:6 -6 If we **say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie** and do not practice the truth; NASB

1 John 3:9-11 - 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, **because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.** 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are

obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. NASB

Hope all this helps.

Grudem.....

C. God and Man Cooperate in Sanctification

Some (such as John Murray)¹⁰ object to saying that God and man “cooperate” in sanctification, because they want to insist that God’s work is primary and our work in sanctification is only a secondary one (see Phil. 2:12–13). However, if we explain the nature of God’s role and our role in sanctification clearly, it does not seem inappropriate to say that God and man cooperate in sanctification. God works in our sanctification and we work as well, and we work for the same purpose. We are not saying that we have equal roles in sanctification or that we both work in the same way, but simply that we cooperate with God in ways that are appropriate to our status as God’s creatures. And the fact that Scripture emphasizes the role that we play in sanctification (with all the moral commands of the New Testament), makes it appropriate to teach that God calls us to cooperate with him in this activity.¹¹

1. God’s Role in Sanctification. Since sanctification is primarily a work of God, it is appropriate that Paul prays, “May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly” (1 Thess. 5:23). One specific role of God the Father in this sanctification is his process of disciplining us as his children (see Heb. 12:5–11). Paul tells the Philippians, “*God is at work in you* both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13), thus indicating something of the way in which God sanctifies them—both by causing them to want his will and by giving them power to do it. The author of Hebrews speaks of the role of the Father and the role of the Son in a familiar benediction: “Now may the God of peace...equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever” (Heb. 13:20–21).

The role of God the Son, Jesus Christ, in sanctification is, first, that he *earned* our sanctification for us. Therefore Paul could say that God made Christ to be “our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). Moreover, in the process of sanctification, Jesus is also our *example* for we are to run the race of life “looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). Peter tells his readers, “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). And John says, “He who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6).

¹⁰ 10. Ibid., pp. 148–49.

¹¹ 11. On the other hand, if we wish to say that sanctification is entirely God’s work, and that we use the means of sanctification in order to contribute to it (or some similar expression), the meaning is the same. I am simply concerned that if we say sanctification is entirely God’s work, we can be misunderstood and encourage an excessively passive role on the part of Christians, who may be led to think that they need to do nothing in the process of sanctification in their lives.

But it is specifically God the Holy Spirit who works within us to change us and sanctify us, giving us greater holiness of life. Peter speaks of the “sanctification of the Spirit” (1 Peter 1:2, author’s translation), and Paul speaks of “sanctification by the Spirit” (2 Thess. 2:13). It is the Holy Spirit who produces in us the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23), those character traits that are part of greater and greater sanctification. If we grow in sanctification we “walk by the Spirit” and are “led by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16–18; cf. Rom. 8:14), that is, we are more and more responsive to the desires and promptings of the Holy Spirit in our life and character. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of holiness, and he produces holiness within us.¹²

2. Our Role in Sanctification. The role that we play in sanctification is both a *passive* one in which we depend on God to sanctify us, and an *active* one in which we strive to obey God and take steps that will increase our sanctification. We can now consider both of these aspects of our role in sanctification.

First, what may be called the “passive” role that we play in sanctification is seen in texts that encourage us to trust God or to pray and ask that he sanctify us. Paul tells his readers, “*Yield yourselves to God* as men who have been brought from death to life” (Rom. 6:13; cf. v. 19), and he tells the Roman Christians, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1). Paul realizes that we are dependent on the Holy Spirit’s work to grow in sanctification, because he says, “If *by the Spirit* you put to death the deeds of the body you will live” (Rom. 8:13).

Unfortunately today, this “passive” role in sanctification, this idea of yielding to God and trusting him to work in us “to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13), is sometimes so strongly emphasized that it is the only thing people are told about the path of sanctification. Sometimes the popular phrase “let go and let God” is given as a summary of how to live the Christian life. But this is a tragic distortion of the doctrine of sanctification, for it only speaks of one half of the part we must play, and, by itself, will lead Christians to become lazy and to neglect the active role that Scripture commands them to play in their own sanctification.

That active role which we are to play is indicated by Romans 8:13, where Paul says, “If by the Spirit *you* put to death the deeds of the body you will live.” Here Paul acknowledges that it is “by the Spirit” that we are able to do this. But he also says we must do it! It is not the Holy Spirit who is commanded to put to death the deeds of the flesh, but Christians! Similarly, Paul tells the Philippians, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation* with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12–13). Paul encourages them to obey even more than they did when he was present. He says that obedience is the way in which they “work out [their] own salvation,” meaning that they will “work out” the further realization of the benefits of salvation in their Christian life.¹³ The Philippians are to work at this growth in sanctification, and to do it solemnly and with reverence (“with fear and trembling”), for they are doing it in the presence of God himself. But there is more: the reason why they are to work and to expect that their work will yield positive results is that “God is at work in you—the prior and foundational work of God in sanctification means that their own work is empowered by God; therefore it will be worthwhile and will bear positive results.

cf cf.—compare

¹² 12. See chapter 30, pp. 642–43, for a further discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification.

¹³ 13. This verse does not use the word “salvation” to refer to initial justification, but to the ongoing process of experiencing more and more of the blessings of salvation; here, “salvation” is roughly equivalent to “sanctification.”

There are many aspects to this active role that we are to play in sanctification. We are to “*Strive...for the holiness* without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14); we are to “*abstain from immorality*” and so obey the will of God, which is our “sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). John says that those who hope to be like Christ when he appears will actively work at purification in this life: “And every one who thus hopes in him *purifies himself* as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). Paul tells the Corinthians to “*shun immorality*” (1 Cor. 6:18), and not to have partnership with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). He then says, “Let us *cleanse ourselves* from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). This kind of striving for obedience to God and for holiness may involve great effort on our part, for Peter tells his readers to “*make every effort*” to grow in character traits that accord with godliness (2 Peter 1:5). Many specific passages of the New Testament encourage detailed attention to various aspects of holiness and godliness in life (see Rom. 12:1–13:14; Eph. 4:17–6:20; Phil. 4:4–9; Col. 3:5–4:6; 1 Peter 2:11–5:11; et al.). We are continually to build up patterns and habits of holiness, for one measure of maturity is that mature Christians “have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb. 5:14).

The New Testament does not suggest any short-cuts by which we can grow in sanctification, but simply encourages us repeatedly to give ourselves to the old-fashioned, time-honored means of Bible reading and meditation (Ps. 1:2; Matt. 4:4; John 17:17), prayer (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6), worship (Eph. 5:18–20), witnessing (Matt. 28:19–20), Christian fellowship (Heb. 10:24–25), and self-discipline or self-control (Gal. 5:23; Titus 1:8).

It is important that we continue to grow both in our passive trust in God to sanctify us and in our active striving for holiness and greater obedience in our lives. If we neglect active striving to obey God, we become passive, lazy Christians. If we neglect the passive role of trusting God and yielding to him, we become proud and overly confident in ourselves. In either case, our sanctification will be greatly deficient. We must maintain faith and diligence to obey at the same time. The old hymn wisely says, “*Trust and obey* for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”¹⁴

One more point must be added to this discussion of our role in sanctification: sanctification is usually a corporate process in the New Testament. It is something that happens in community. We are admonished, “Let us consider how to *stir up one another to love and good works* not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24–25). Together Christians are “built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5); together they are “a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9); together they are to “encourage one another and build one another up” (1 Thess. 5:11). Paul says that “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1) is to live in a special way in community—“with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2–3). When that happens, the body of Christ functions as a unified whole, with each part “working properly,” so that corporate sanctification occurs as it “makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love” (Eph. 4:16; cf. 1 Cor. 12:12–26; Gal. 6:1–2). It is significant that the fruit of the Spirit includes many things that build community (“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,” Gal. 5:22–23), whereas “the works of the flesh” destroy community (“fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like,” Gal. 5:19–21).

¹⁴ 14. Comparing our life to a tree with two large roots, John Livingstone said, “Satan strikes . . . either at the root of faith or at the root of diligence” (quoted in D.M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer* [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1969], p. 39).

¹Grudem, W. A. (1994). *Systematic theology : An introduction to biblical doctrine* (753).
Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House.