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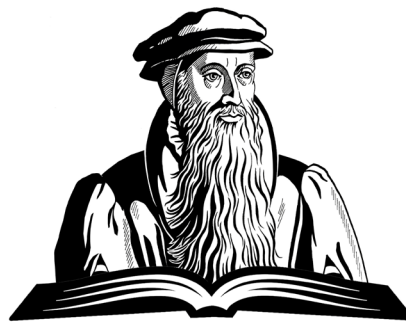
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #26

Sanctification

Catechism Question 35



The John Knox Institute
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Rev. Jonathan Mattull is minister of the gospel at Sovereign Grace Presbyterian Church, in St. Louis, Missouri, a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), Presbytery of the United States of America.

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- 26. Sanctification—*Question 35***
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- 28. Blessings of Salvation at Death—*Question 37*
- 29. Blessings of Salvation at the Resurrection—*Question 38*
- 30. The Duty Required of Man—*Questions 39 through 42*
- 31. The Ten Commandments—*Question 43*
- 32. *Coming Soon*
- 33. *Coming Soon*
- 34. *Coming Soon*
- 35. *Coming Soon*
- 36. *Coming Soon*
- 37. *Coming Soon*
- 38. *Coming Soon*
- 39. *Coming Soon*
- 40. *Coming Soon*

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VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

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Lecture #26

Sanctification

Question 35: *What is sanctification?*

Answer: *Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.*

So far, we've looked at two great blessings of salvation. We've looked at justification and adoption. Were this all that believers experienced in this life, theirs would be a life of immeasurable blessing. However, the Lord provides another blessing in this treasure of salvation, and that's sanctification. "Sanctification" is another big word. It comes from the word "sanctify," which means "to set apart." In the Bible, when something is sanctified, that means that it's set apart to God and to his service. This is related to the word "holy." When something is sanctified, it is then holy, or separated unto God. It's no longer to be used for common things. It's certainly not to be used for sinful things. And we can see something of an illustration of this in the anointing oil used in the Old Testament. Notice Exodus 30, verses 25 through 29: "And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, and ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil. And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy." Well, the oil was holy, by God's purpose. It was set apart unto God's use, and it was used to sanctify other things for God's use: the altar of incense, the burnt offering, as well as even the priest. All of this helps us understand the idea of sanctification. God, who is himself most holy, sets his people apart unto himself, and makes them like he is—holy. When you read the New Testament, you'll often see that church members are referred to as saints. Literally, this word "saints" means "holy ones." Believers are people who God has sanctified and is sanctifying.

Let's look at the Question in the Catechism, Question #35: "What is sanctification?" "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." We've already talked about the words "sanctify" and "sanctification," so let's take up our lesson in three parts: first, The Goal of Sanctification; second, The Parts of Sanctification; and third, The Progress of Sanctification.

First, The Goal of Sanctification. If we want to understand something, it's helpful to consider

its goal or purpose. For instance, if we are taking a trip, we need to know our goal or destination. When we've seen where our goal is, it helps us understand the way that we should take to get there. Well, sanctification has a goal. You can see it in the Catechism when it says, "We are renewed in the whole man after the image of God." This means God is making us to be more like he is. His goal is to make us, and all that we are, to better resemble him, and bear his image faithfully as we serve him. Of course, man was made in God's image. However, by sin, man has ruined and defaced that image.

Some of you have probably seen statues from ancient times. Some of these are missing their hands, and others are missing their noses, others are missing a leg, but you can still tell what they were supposed to be. But they no longer bear that image in the full beauty that they once did. Well, this is like fallen man. He's a ruined image of God. Sin has corrupted and ruined him, so that the image of God is no longer seen in its beauty. In fact, man so sins that he perverts that reflection of God, which is one thing that makes him so wicked.

But God has been pleased to renew and restore this image in his people. This is one reason the Christian is called "a new man." Notice how Paul addresses this in Ephesians 4, verses 22 through 24. He writes "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The new man believers put on is created in righteousness and true holiness after, that is, according to God. In other words, God is righteous and holy. Sanctification makes his people to resemble him in righteousness and holiness. Paul says something similar in Colossians 3, verse 10—believers "have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." In other words, the goal of sanctification is to bear God's image truly and really, he comes to know God, and by grace, he comes to resemble God.

Notice, this is in the whole man. It's not just in the outward performance of actions, or in the words we speak. It certainly includes those things, but it includes as well the whole man of thoughts, and desires, as well as words and actions. The purpose of sanctification is to renew the whole man to reflect and bear God's image faithfully, as we know, trust, love, and serve him.

Well, second, The Parts of Sanctification. "Sanctification is the work of God's grace," making us more like he is. This is seen in two primary ways. The first of these is in what we stop doing, by his grace. And the second of these is in what we start doing, by his grace. Notice the Catechism, "Whereby we die more and more unto sin, and live unto righteousness." These two parts—dying to sin, and living to righteousness—help us consider God's gracious work of sanctification more clearly. Let's look at each of these in order, first dying to sin, and second, living to righteousness.

To die unto sin—well, although men in this world are physically alive, apart from God's grace, they are spiritually dead. Ephesians 2 states this very clearly. This should not lead us to think that sin is inactive like a corpse. Sin is active, but not in any life-giving way. Rather, it's like an infection or a cancer that is actively correcting the individual. Everything that it touches, it ruins and destroys. It hurts and injures, it twists and contorts the desires of men to love what is evil, and to hate what is good.

Well, the bad news is that sin is not contained in one part of man, but rather, the whole man has been infected with and corrupted by sin. This is God's testimony against man, in Genesis 6, verse 5: "GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Well, justification pardons us all our sin, and credits Christ's righteousness to us, that we may be declared righteous in his sight and accepted by

God. But justification does not renew our own personal corruption. It doesn't fix or transform our twisted desires. But the good news is that God does deal with our sinful desires and thoughts. He does this in sanctification.

In his work of sanctification, he causes his people to die unto sin. And what an expression that is—to die unto sin! And this is how Paul speaks of believers, in Romans 6, verse 11, he exhorts believers, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Unfortunately, sin is still active in the believer. However, the believer is to die to it. He's no longer to be enticed by it. He's not longer to listen to it. He's no longer to obey it. We could think of it this way, if a human dies physically, his body is no longer responsive to the things around him. He no longer finds delight in the beautiful sunset. He is no longer excited by what others talk about. He's uninfluenced by those things. Well, in the same way, the believer is to die to the false beauties and delights of sin. In a moment, we'll talk about how this happens, but for now, simply notice that God privileges believers that they die to sin more and more, day by day.

Well, there's another part or side to sanctification—to live unto righteousness. If we think of the first part, dying unto sin, as if it tells us what we should not do—we should not live for sin; we can think of the second part, living to righteousness, as what we should do. The believer is transformed to say “No” to sin. With this, he is transformed to say “Yes” to righteousness. Righteousness refers to what is right or good—not in man's sight, because man is a false judge—but in God's sight, who is the only standard of righteousness. Sinners do not love what is righteous; they hate it. Now many pretend to be righteous. They may sincerely be concerned about their outward appearance before others, and so they do outwardly impressive things. They may serve others, but they're never doing it because they love God. They're not doing it because they love righteousness as God defines it. They do not do the right things because they love God. Many of the Pharisees were this way. They went to synagogue, they prayed, they studied the Bible, they carried themselves with outward dignity. Yet, Christ saw through all of this. On one occasion, he called them whited sepulchres, or whitewashed tombs. On the outside, they looked glorious, however, on the inside, they were corrupt—full of dead men's bones.

God's work of sanctification does not make us Pharisees. Instead, it makes us love righteousness, and live to righteousness in all that we are, in our desires and actions, as well as thoughts and words. Moreover, sanctification makes us to love these things. Paul declares this in Romans 7, verse 22: “I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” Having been transformed by God's grace, the believer now delights in God's will—his law, which is exactly what God promised to do for his people, in Jeremiah 31, verse 33. It says, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” In other words, he transforms them from the inside out. He makes them to love righteousness, which then leads them to walk in the way of righteousness. And all of this is by his grace.

Well third, The Progress of Sanctification. When God converts a sinner, he sets him apart from his former way of life. So the believer, as soon as he believes, is now sanctified, that is, he's set apart to God. However, it does not mean that he's fully loving God, and all of his desires and thoughts are perfectly conformed to the law of God. In fact, Paul said that he delighted in the law of God after the inward man, yet he struggled with it in that he still sinned. So though the believer is now sanctified—set apart to God—there's the need for God to continue his work of sanctifying him. And this is what he does throughout the believer's life. He continues to cause the believer to grow in likeness to God, and in intimacy with God. In other words, a believer will be more like

God at the end of his life than what he was when he was first converted. This is because God works progressively in the life of a believer. He does not make him perfectly holy in his thoughts, and words, and actions at the beginning of grace. Instead, he begins a work that he will continue all the days of his life.

We should note that this work will not be perfected in this life. The most holy Christian will still face temptation and sin. Full perfection of holiness is known to our souls at death, and to our bodies and souls together at the resurrection of the dead. In fact, we get to talk more about these truths in coming lessons. But for now, simply note that the believer genuinely grows in holiness, all throughout this life. This is how Paul expresses this truth, in Philippians 1, verse 6: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Notice, it’s already begun, but it’s not yet finished, and yet it will continue to the end.

Additionally, this reminds us that it is God who works within us. It is his work in us. We are not the cause, or the author of our sanctification. Rather, it’s a gracious work of God in us. Again, in Philippians, but this time, chapter 2, verse 13, we read this: “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” While it is true that we are active, but we are enabled by his grace to desire and choose what is according to God’s pleasure, it is God that makes us able to do so.

Now, sanctification is a work of God’s grace. But how is it that God causes this to take place in us? Well, it’s the outworking of his eternal purpose to save us, and it’s through our union and our fellowship with Christ. This is what Christ meant when he compared himself to a vine, and his people to branches bearing fruit. In John 15:5, he says, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” Don’t miss the encouragement here, if you are a believer. Whoever abides, that is, remains in him by faith and communes with Christ, “bringeth forth much fruit.” This is a great promise indeed, worthy of our meditation and our prayer asking God to bring this forth in us. In other words, Christ supplies us his grace to enliven us unto holy living and fruitfulness to the glory of God. Peter expresses the same idea, in 2 Peter 1, verses 2 and 3: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” Everything that is needed to live a life of godliness is given through the knowledge of Jesus, our Lord.

We could say it this way, there is no holiness apart from Jesus Christ. Because God supplies all that we need for godly living in Christ only. He is the spring, or source, of all holiness and sanctification. This is why Paul can write, in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 30, “But of him”—that is, of God—“are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Christ is the source of our wisdom, of our righteousness, and redemption. He is these things for us. But notice, he is also our sanctification. This means there is no growth in holiness without a relationship with Christ, such a relationship that is not in name only or word only, but such a relationship as by faith, we are in him, and draw from him all that he supplies.

Well, how do we do this? Well, as we’ve noted, we do this only as God is gracious to us. But as he is gracious to us, notice what God causes to happen. We’ve seen in 2 Peter 1 the way that God directs us to Christ. Notice now, in 2 Peter 1, verse 4: “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped

the corruption that is in the world through lust.” In other words, God has given us these promises, exceeding great and precious, as Peter says, and we are to rely upon these, to believe them, to draw them before the Lord and claim them before him, asking his merciful provision of all that he’s promised. And as he graciously does, we then benefit by them, and we grow as he supplies us all that he’s promised, through faith in Christ. How is it that God has this happen? His grace ever directs us to Christ, and places within our hands promises that we bring before him, and say, “Fulfill what you’ve promised.” And by his grace, he answers those promises.

Well, let’s close with a few applications. First, here is encouragement for the believer. One great problem that the believer faces is he looks at himself, and he says, “Oh, I’m not what I should be.” But here is great encouragement, for you’ve been given the great and beautiful privilege to be sanctified. It’s already begun. But remember that in this work of grace, God continues to transform you, you who were once a rebel, now to be a brilliant reflection of himself. The world may not see this as a privilege, but eternity will prove this to be an exceedingly rich blessing indeed, that we should be made like unto God in holiness, that we should bear his image increasingly in this life, and with perfection in the life to come. Believer, whatever your deficiency now is, by God’s grace, this is what he’s doing in you, and soon enough, you will see it, to the glory of Christ.

But second, a caution—it’s important to remember that sanctification does not lead or cause salvation. We do not first seek to be holy so that God would then save us. Instead, salvation leads to sanctification. In fact, sanctification is a part of salvation. Those who are saved by grace through faith in Christ are sanctified by the same grace that has saved them. Only those who trust in Christ will ever be sanctified. So we must first trust Christ. Never forget this. If you become convicted of your sins when you look at God’s law, your first step is not to say, “Now I’m going to keep God’s law.” Your first step is to say, “Now I need the one who kept God’s law, that he might pardon me, and by his grace then likewise sanctify me.”

Well last, if you and I want greater likeness to God, as believers, we must be much with Christ by faith. As we open his Word, we seek Christ. As we attend public worship, we seek Christ. Learn his promises. Memorize his promises. But also be sure to plead his promises. And as you do, may you know the gracious blessing of drawing life from Christ who is your life, and better showing forth the glory of God’s image in your life, till the day it is perfected by his grace.