

Sanctification and Good Works

Lesson 1

Sanctification: What it is

The doctrine of sanctification is actually two-fold in its nature. The first portion, internal sanctification, involves the sanctifying of our souls the moment we receive salvation. This work is accomplished solely by the initiative and authority of the Godhead and finds its eternal completion at the instant of regeneration. It is perfect and complete because God is both author and finisher of the work. The second portion, external sanctification, comes as a result of internal sanctification; it is to be a progressive, life-long work. This second portion, the part that involves the regenerated man, is the process upon which our 10th Article of Faith is founded.

X. Of Sanctification

“We believe that sanctification is the process by which, according to the will of God, we are made partakers of his holiness: that it is a progressive work; that it is begun in regeneration; and that it is carried on in the hearts of believers by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the Sealer and Comforter, in the continual use of the appointed means – especially the Word of God, self-examination, self-denial, watchfulness and prayer.”

I. Definitions

- a. Sanctify (verb): to make holy, set apart as sacred; consecrate; to purify or free from sin.
- b. Sanctification (noun): the act of sanctifying.
- c. HAGIASMOS (Greek noun): separation to God; the course of life befitting those so separated.

II. Old Testament

The word “sanctify” in the Old Testament frequently has the meaning of “setting apart”. It means the taking of something that was common before, which might legitimately have been put to ordinary uses, and setting it apart for God’s service alone. It was then called sanctified or holy.

a. The Sabbath

Genesis 2:3 states, *“And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.”* The seventh day was like any other and God certainly rested for our benefit and example, not due to fatigue. God took this “ordinary” day and set it aside, consecrating it for man’s use and His glory. Presently, our Christian Sabbath (Sunday) is to be sanctified before the Lord and used for rest and worship of God. Any other pursuit or endeavor on this Sabbath is a direct violation of the 4th commandment which instructs us to “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (**Exodus 20:8**) **Exodus 20:10-11**, *“But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.”*

b. The Tabernacle

Exodus 29:43-44 *“And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office.”* God sanctified Aaron and his sons as priests and also sanctified the tabernacle of the congregation and its altar as a place for them to minister to Him. Specifically, they took common instruments: a table, an altar, a golden candlestick, etc. and consecrated them unto the Lord. Thereby they were declared holy by the Lord and were to be only used for the service of God by Aaron and his sons. Anyone desecrating these sanctified items was in grave danger of the wrath of God as Belshazzar experienced in **Daniel 5**.

Secondarily, the Old Testament Hebrew also offers a word for “sanctify” which means “*to actually purify or to make holy*”. In the OT days, this was by outward purification with ceremonies and rituals according to the law. In **Exodus 19:10-12** God instructed Moses to “sanctify” the people in preparation to meet God at Mt. Sinai. Joshua also gave this type of command when he instructed the people to “sanctify yourselves” prior to crossing the Jordan. **Joshua 3:5**

III. Christ

Jesus was born of a woman, made under the Law and sent forth in the fullness of time to be the savior of the world. He sanctified (set aside) himself for this purpose. He understood His work and mission from Heaven was to redeem Adam’s fallen race by becoming the perfect sacrifice; that His shed blood would satisfy the law of God, please His Father, and atone for the transgressions of all men. Jesus sanctified Himself for OUR benefit and focused intently upon the work His Father had assigned. He attests to this in **John 4:34**, *“Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.”* Yet another wonderful aspect of the work of our Savior’s sacrifice is his authority in fulfilling the law of God. In doing so, He redeems us from our sin by forgiveness and delivers us unto Himself by sanctification to be His forever. It is by Christ’s power that we have been adopted and have become sons and heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ (**Romans 8:17**). Thus, Jesus prays to His Father in **John 17:19**, *“And for their sakes I sanctify myself that they also might be sanctified through the truth.”*

IV. New Testament

In the New Testament, the Law of God becomes spiritualized by Christ and His church is instructed to observe not only the physical laws, but now also the moral law which accompanies it. Jesus taught we should continue to not kill, but also to avoid hate. He commended abstinence from adultery, but then warned against the equaled effects of lust. It was up to each believer to control his fleshly acts and now, also his inward thoughts and emotions against sin. The goal of Christ’s teaching was to promote the complete consecration of the man, soul and body, unto the Lord. God saves souls and creates the

new creatures within (**II Corinthians 5:17**). We are to render ourselves as living sacrifices unto Him (**Romans 12:1**) by the process of continual, voluntary and purposeful sanctification. Salvation (internal sanctification) is a work **for** us. Consecration (External sanctification) is a work **in** us.

II Timothy 2:21

“If a man therefore purge (or cleanse) himself from these (sins in general), he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet (or serviceable) for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.”

What we may know of sanctification from the New Testament:

a. It is God’s will for the believer

I Thessalonians 4:3 *“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.”*

b. It is God’s goal for calling us via the gospel

I Thessalonians 4:7 *“For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.”*

c. It must be learned from God

I Thessalonians 4:4 *“That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;”*

d. It is taught by God’s Word

John 17:17,19 *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth;” “And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.”*

e. It is empowered by the Holy Spirit

Romans 8:13 *“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”*

Ephesians 3:16 *“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.”*

V. In Common Terms

Sanctification is a calling, the duty and obligation of every child of God. If salvation has been imparted unto your soul from Heaven’s throne, your “reasonable service” is to yield your members as instruments unto the Lord. We must fulfill both Old Testament definitions by setting ourselves aside for His use and holiness, and then by actually becoming holy through obedience to His word and Holy Spirit. We should endeavor to follow Christ’s example and make the emulation of His virtues our aim. We must strive to not be satisfied only with serving a holy God, but to yearn to BE holy as He is holy (**1 Peter 1:16**).

Sanctification and Good Works

Lesson 2

The Progressive Marks of Sanctification

The book of first John is a letter to first century Christians describing, among other things, some assurances of salvation.

I John 5:13 *“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”*

John describes several qualities or attributes that should sprout from within following the new birth. John states that the truly converted will love the brethren (**2:9-11, 3:14-15**), detest the world (**2:15-17**), love in deed and truth (**3:18-19**), have no fear (**4:18**), and will keep God’s commandments (**5:2-3**). All of these attributes are resultant of external sanctification, the process by which a purposeful focus towards holiness of heart begins to yield a holiness of life. It is a process by which our hidden treasure (salvation) is allowed to shine through this earthen vessel (our flesh) and glorify our Savior. Paul writes it this way to the Philippian church, *“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”* (**Philippians 2:12-13**)

Where genuine salvation (redemption) is experienced, a new creature is created and all things become new (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). The sinner’s soul is made white under the blood of the Lamb of God (**Revelation 7:14**) and sealed by the Holy Ghost (**Ephesians 4:30**) until it is redeemed to a new, heavenly body. A new heart is given, susceptible to sin, but enabled to receive and reciprocate God’s love. It has been offered that regeneration implants the germ of holiness in the heart and sanctification is the unfolding of that germ. Regeneration is the method by which God saves our souls through the blood of Jesus. Sanctification is the tool he gives us by which our lives may be saved as well. We may have saved souls and lost (or ineffective) lives which do nothing to glorify our Savior. If truly saved, our singular assignment is to glorify the Lord by purposefully surrendering ourselves to the process of sanctification. Paul writes in **Romans 12:1-2** *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”*

Regeneration is an instantaneous, complete work done entirely by the Godhead. It is the internal sanctification of the soul. External (the flesh) sanctification is a life-long process by which we seek to grow and mature in holiness and godliness. God has given us a wonderful tool for guidance towards sanctification, His Word. Within His Word are contained several benchmarks or markers which encourage us along the correct path toward holy living and greater consecration to the Lord.

I. Sanctification implies the crucifixion of sin

Romans 8:13 *“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify (put to death) the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”* We are instructed to crucify or slay sin. It is our enemy, hateful and destructive to everything that is holy and godly. We are, at times, tempted to take a favorite sin and

tuck it away out of sight for later use. Jesus taught that it was better to pluck out an eye or cut off a hand than to allow it to continue to offend with sin (**Matthew 5:29-30**). Christ used this figurative advice to stress the dangers and damaging effects of sin. Our soul may be set apart, perfectly holy and kept by the Lord Himself, but our lives consist of a continual war between the inner man (spiritual) and the outer (carnal) man (Romans 7:14-24). The outer man and all of his accoutrements must be completely and continually slain in order for the inner man to thrive and sanctification to blossom. To forsake the inward battle against sin is to forego sanctification and success in our walk before the Lord. Indeed, being “Christian” is so much more than “being a good person”.

II. Sanctification involves the growth and improvement of the Christian graces

I Corinthians 13:13 *“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”*

a. **Faith**, the substance of things hoped for and evidence of things not seen, is a grace that must grow within us. **2 Thessalonians 1:3** *“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly.”* It is observable that faith and our sanctification are proportionately intertwined so that as one grows, so does the other. In fact, the degree of faith is the measure of sanctification. **Acts 26:18**, *“...that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”*

b. **Hope** also may and must increase. **Romans 15:13**, *“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”* In understanding that hope springs from faith, a strong and growing faith will yield a greater hope in our Lord and lead us to yearn for His Promises yet to be realized. In other terms, the more we cast our affection and trust upon the Lord and Heaven, the more anxious we become to enjoy both! **I John 3:3**, *“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth (sanctifies) himself, even as he is pure.”* Therefore, we add to our increasing faith an accompanying hope that, coupled together, advance our sanctification.

c. **Charity** (Love) is called the greatest or preeminent of these graces and it also is meant to abound within us and from us as Christians. **I Thessalonians 3:12-13**, *“And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”* Easily understood, *“God is love”* (**I John 4:16**) and the more we genuinely love, the more we become like Him. The more we become Christ-like, the further our sanctification progresses. **I John 4:16**, *“He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”*

III. Sanctification involves an increasing conformity to the divine will

Until heaven is realized, we will continually struggle with the enmity between God’s perfect will and our sinful will. We, being born in sin, have a broken and deprave nature or will. Repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ redeems our souls from eternal damnation, but our sinful will and appetite for sin remains in our flesh. Sanctification (externally) is the slaying of our own will for the

purpose of submitting to God's holy will (which is painfully against our sinful nature). We may, as Christians, conform to God's will, but we will never fully enjoy or grasp it with both hands until released from our sinful nature. Often as babes in Christ, we find it difficult and unpleasant to forsake our own desires and wants in lieu of God's Word and doctrines. As we mature, the service of the Lord should, through sanctification, become less a duty and more a joy and delight in the Lord. To a child, the life of an adult seems mundane and responsibility-laden. To a mature adult, the joys of life are centered upon the very activities that seem so distasteful to the child. It has been correctly said that, "some people never grow up", meaning they are fully grown but remain childish in action and emotion. Sometimes Christians don't grow up either. Conforming to the divine will is NOT a punishment, but a joy; a joy which takes some maturity to realize. The process of sanctification provides this increasing maturity. **Philippians 2:13** *"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."*

IV. Some other evidences of sanctification

a. A deep sense of unworthiness

The Scriptures clearly demonstrate that the closer men get to the Lord, the more unworthy they feel and the meeker they become. God's people were even fearful of Mt. Sinai when God dwelt there and they sent Moses for them. Job, humbled when God spoke to him out of the whirlwind, confessed, *"I am vile"* in **Job 40:4**. Isaiah proclaimed himself a man of unclean lips as God spoke to him in Isaiah 6. More directly, each child of God can remember feeling fearful, vile and unclean in the Lord's presence. Convicted of our sin and despairing of all other help, we became humble penitents to God. It is that very feeling which we must seek and accept in our pursuit of God's holiness in our lives. We continue to experience intimidation, humiliation and abasement in the presence of the Lord as we remain in our sinful nature. A sanctified life, a walk closer to the Lord, will promote and produce greater humility. Show me a "proud" Christian and I will show you a man who either does not know Christ or one who does not know Him very well.

b. A growing interest in the means of grace

The Word of God is a primary tool of sanctification. Jesus prayed to the Father in **John 17:17**, *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."* Constant study of the word of God and meditation on its precepts and instruction is the duty of every Christian. However, only the dutiful attendance of and adherence to its eternal truths can result in sanctification. The study of God's word must progress from a dutiful approach to a joy and spiritual appetite for its application toward sanctification. *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."* **Psalms 119:11**

Prayer is another tool which the Holy Spirit makes effectual both the study of God's Word and the Christian's prayer closet. While the majority of the Christian's prayer life is a private work and joy, there is also a public component which is indicative of the private portion. An insincere or half-hearted prayer closet will retard the work of sanctification within the believer and stunt any progress regardless of the other works of sanctification occurring concurrently such as observation of the Sabbath, attendance of the Lord's house, etc. There is no suitable substitute for prayer in the life of the Christian who sincerely desires and pursues a sanctified life.

c. An increasing love of things heavenly

Colossians 3:1-4 *“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”*

Increasing sanctification will naturally lead us to love the things pertaining to Christ and to abhor the things of the world. An honest and consistent pursuit of things godly will inevitably transform our affections from those things earthy to the heavenly. As our affections go, so go our actions and manner of living. The closer we get to “home” the more we desire to complete our journey and spend eternity with our Savior.

These “marks” are set for our benefit, offered as a means of self-checking our progress (or lack thereof) towards external sanctification. However, they are not just “helpful hints” offered as a means of self-improvement; they are, more accurately, our responsibilities towards our Savior. To not apply ourselves towards mastery of ALL these disciplines is to fail altogether.

***This lesson is drawn from information found in Christian Doctrines by J.M.Pendleton; specifically, chapter 21: Sanctification.**

Sanctification and Good Works

Lesson 3

Good Works: The Proof of a Living Faith

James 2:14-18

"¹⁴ What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. ¹⁸ Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."

If genuine, good works and faith are described by James as inseparable. Faith without works is dead and works without faith is just as useless. It is the coupling of these two which yield the product sought by the Lord. Faith alone may profit the Christian, but not the world. Works alone may profit the world, but not the Christian.

One Missionary Baptist preacher described this relationship as a man in a rowboat. Both oars are useful and beneficial, but if the man uses only one oar he is bound to work in circles. For proper propulsion and direction, the man must use both oars equally or the desired effect will be lost. This picture is a wonderful analogy of how our Savior must look upon His children. He has graciously saved us (rowboat) and given us all the tools we need to find success (both oars). His provisions have also included a "How-To" instruction manual (Bible) and a guide (Holy Spirit). The good works wrought through our obedience yields the only "proof" the world may see of Christ living within us.

I. Why Good Works?

a. We were created for such

Ephesians 2:8-10 "⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Every person who experiences genuine salvation is created anew in Christ Jesus for this purpose: to serve as His workmanship and to walk in His path and footsteps. We may do many things in this life, but we have been created / saved for only one: to please and praise the Lord.

b. We give evidence of willful obedience

Romans 7:2-24 *"²² For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"*

For good works to be accomplished in our lives, we must mortify our own deeds and the will of the (outer) sinful man. The inner (spiritual) man must be given preeminence, that our sinful nature may be overcome, albeit never completely and never without the Lord's help.

c. We glorify God

Matthew 5:16 *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

The acid test of good works is whether the Lord is glorified. If something is done, no matter how well admired or received, via pride or self-advancement it is not a good work. Perhaps a good deed is sought by some more than good work. Good works seek only to glorify the Father and point men to the feet of the Savior.

d. We serve as witness against unbelievers

I Peter 2:12 *“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

The Scriptures teach that God’s children will sit with Him in judgment as witnesses to all truth. Our good works will illuminate our testimonies of grace in this life and the perfection and glory of our Savior in eternity.

e. We flourish in God’s service

I Timothy 6:18 *“That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.”*

This is actually a portion of a charge which Paul gave to Timothy for those he would be pastoring who were wealthy in the world. His advice was to do good, to seek richness in good works, being generous and ready to share and help others. Paul wanted these people to flourish in the work of the Lord and was advising them to shift their focus away from the wealth of the world and toward the wealth of the Lord found through good works. If we are to flourish as God’s people, we must live as God instructs us to live. We cannot serve two masters.

f. We demonstrate a life pattern

Titus 2:7-8 *“In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.”*

Good works ought not to be a once-in-a-while occurrence during revival or a youth retreat. Rather, Paul instructs another young minister here to teach his flock that good works must be a life pattern. They must be sought, taught, and accomplished daily. It is to be a way of life.

II. Good works commanded and encouraged

a. **Psalm 34:14** *“Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.”*

b. **Psalm 37:3** *“Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.”*

c. **Luke 6:35** *“But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.”*

d. **Hebrews 13:16** *“But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”*

e. **James 4:17** *“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”*

III. Examples of good works

a. The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

Matthew 25:31-46

“³¹ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:³² And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:³³ And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.³⁴ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:³⁵ For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:³⁶ Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.³⁷ Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?³⁸ When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?³⁹ Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?⁴⁰ And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.⁴¹ Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:⁴² For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:⁴³ I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.⁴⁴ Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?⁴⁵ Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.⁴⁶ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

The teaching here is NOT that the sheep entered into the kingdom because of all their good works. Rather, they entered in because they were sheep – likened unto the Lamb of God, the judge of the world. The desire of the sheep was to do good, as the Lamb of God was good, and these works were indicative of their changed nature as sheep. The promise of eternity in heaven was in being a sheep, but the proof of the change was in the Christ-glorifying works.

b. The Woman with the Alabaster Box

Matthew 26:6-13

“⁶ Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper,⁷ There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.⁸ But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?⁹ For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.¹⁰ When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.¹¹ For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.¹² For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.¹³ Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.”

The disciples were scandalized that this woman “wasted” such a pricey substance as this perfume, but Jesus rebuked them and lauded the sacrifice of the woman as “a good work.” Jesus further testified that this act would be preached within the gospel as a memorial of her “work” for our example. Jesus was indifferent to the box of perfume, but very interested in what he saw in the woman’s heart and her act of devotion / sacrifice.

c. The disciple Tabitha

Acts 9:36 *“Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did.”*

d. The Church at Ephesus

Revelation 2:2 *"I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil...."*

The glorified Jesus tells John to write to the church at Ephesus and to tell them that He knows of their good works.

IV. Good Works and Sanctification

If good works are, as intended, the evidence of the process of sanctification inwardly; then they should be a natural precipitant, not forced or feigned. If the process of sanctification is genuine, the Christian can expect to produce greater and better "fruit" for his Savior. In the natural world, fruit trees don't bear mature fruit right away. It often takes years for the tree to mature internally before it bears outward fruit. Once fruit begins to be borne, however, it is often plentiful and full of flavor! To bear quality fruit in any quantity we must "mature" or become sanctified internally.

Sanctification and Good Works

Lesson Four

Nehemiah's Return: A Sanctified Life for a Good Work

Reading lesson: **Nehemiah 1**

Lesson text: **Nehemiah 1:3-4** *“And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.”*

I. Background

Israel had strayed as a nation from the Jehovah God. The Lord had sent prophets to warn the people to correct their evil ways to no avail. Jeremiah had warned in **Jeremiah 25:11**, *“And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”* Still, the people of Israel refused to return to the Lord's law and provisions. Destruction was assured and its delivery came in the form of the Babylonians, not in a single event but as a process. Eventually, all that remained of God's holy city Jerusalem were the burned gates, torn down walls and its inhabitants deemed unworthy for Babylonian uses.

II. Captivity

The Babylonians took to Babylon all the skilled artisans, astronomers, craftsmen, and other laborers which would be useful to their society. As a result, many of the Lord's people assimilated into this new nation (the antithesis of sanctification) and became, at least in action and lifestyle, Babylonians.

A. Life in Babylon

1. Prosperity: enjoyed some degree of wealth, “freedom”, and the privilege of making their own fortunes and lives....much like the so-called “American Dream”.
2. Diminishing desire to return to Jerusalem: The acute homesickness they initially felt slowly began to ease into a new norm and the longing for life in Jerusalem faded with each passing year.
3. Conformity: the price of this new found prosperity was conforming to Babylonians culture including its religion and paganism. Illustrating how completely lost God's people became is the account of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in **Daniel chapter 3**. Don't recognize these names? You may know them by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego!

B. Life in Jerusalem

1. Remnant: just a few Israelites remained in Jerusalem; they were a poor, discouraged, and leaderless group with little to no reason for hope in a better future. Those who had provided the strength of society had been removed to Babylon as “free” slaves.
2. Ruins: this group had nothing but ruins in which to live and dwell. There were no walls

for protection or gates to keep the enemy at bay. There was no construction going on from a lack of material and skilled laborers. It was a pathetic place.

3. Reproach: These individuals lived in disgrace. They had been touted and promoted as God's people for centuries. God had delivered them again and again and again from their enemies and provided them with all their needs in times of peace. Their position and condition was attributable entirely to their own disobedience and unwillingness to sanctify themselves as God's chosen people.

III. Return

Zerubbabel returned to Jerusalem first, followed by Ezra. Approximately 100 years after Ezra, God prepared a man named Nehemiah to return and set forth the Lord's work in Jerusalem once again. Nehemiah had a good job and comfortable life. He was King Artaxerxes' cupbearer. Some friends came to see Nehemiah from Jerusalem and told him of the deplorable conditions there. This was the result:

a. Nehemiah developed a genuine concern for God's work and people

This is always where the beginning of sanctification is found, in a burden for that which needs to be done for the glory of God.

b. Nehemiah prayed for help

Counting the cost of giving up his comfortable life, Nehemiah weighed his options and found he had no real option; he began to pray to the Lord for help in this task that was pressing upon him.

c. Nehemiah began the work

He returned with a remnant back to Jerusalem. Why would only a few follow a man with such a powerful vision of rebuilding Jerusalem to its former glories?!? Simply put, people were too comfortable and complacent in their Babylonian lives to risk all they had for an uncertain return. They had it too good. Throughout history, many of God's people have missed the wonderful opportunities presented to them for sanctification because their gaze and affection is set upon the world surrounding them.

d. Nehemiah recognized a need for help

Not just the all-important leadership and provisions of the Lord, but physical help of all those returning as well. He set every person to work in a task at a place where they would become fully vested.

IV. The Work

a. Leaders / priests rebuilt the gates

The religious leaders set an example by performing the first tasks: rebuilding and righting the gates of the city which had been burned. People of all occupations and status were employed; no one was exempt or excused from the duty. Each man sanctified himself to this work, albeit very different from his normal duties unto the Lord's people. Godly leadership occurs, at times, in unusual places via unusual means. However, it is not the visible task that motivates, but the evidence of the inward consecration toward the Lord and His work.

b. Family assignments

Nehemiah established the returning Israelites into families and set them about the wall. His assignment was for each family to work together in rebuilding the wall directly in front of their dwelling. The Scriptures reference the fact that many labored with a trowel in one hand (work) and a sword in the other (defense). The Scriptures also teach that as some of the faster working families completed their section of the wall, they proceeded to help other families complete their portion. The goal was completion of the work, not just completion of their respective assignments.

c. Fortitude amidst Opposition

The book of Nehemiah describes slander, mockery, deception, lying, and direct confrontations standing between Nehemiah, the people and completion of the walls and gates. The Lord made a way for each obstacle to be overcome and for the work to be completed.

d. Success

The walls and gates were completed and to prove the worth of God's work and the influence of those sanctified to His work and glory, the task was completed in only 52 days!

V. Application

a. Captivity

Each of us is born in captivity, not in Babylon, but to sin.

Even after our souls are sanctified in salvation, our flesh remains subject to sin.

As a result of our sinful nature in the flesh, we struggle in our lives against becoming captivated by worldly prosperity, weak spirituality and/or conformity to the world.

b. Return

Salvation returns our souls to the safety of our Creator via redemption. Our topic, external sanctification, is the voluntary and willing committal of our lives and flesh to the will and direction of God. It, like the return from Babylon, is not an event, but a process. We are called to recognize His craftsmanship in forming us in His likeness and to develop a genuine concern for His work in this world, forcing our manner of life to be contradictory to the ways of the world. We are to return to the laws of God and seek His pleasure and glory, just as His people did in Nehemiah's day.

c. The Work

Though we may be a part of the "remnant according to the election of grace" (Ro. 11:5), our lives need not be in ruins, earning the reproach of the world. Faith causes us to engage in the Lord's work and, if necessary, fight for the Lord's cause. The secret for Nehemiah's group is found in Nehemiah 4:6. "...for the people had a mind to work."

d. Success

Success in our life's work is more than finding meaning or purpose as so many seem to seek. Our singular purpose is to honor and glorify the Lord in this life and throughout eternity. True

sanctification will shed a glorious light on the truth found in **I Timothy 6:6**, “*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*”

Sources utilized:

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