



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 179

Positional sanctification – The Bible calls all who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, and have been declared as just before God, as having already been sanctified (1 Corinthians 6:11). Because of what Christ did, we who believe in Him have once-for-all been “sanctified” and “perfected” (Hebrews 10:10, 14). This is the first and primary aspect of our sanctification, which takes place at the beginning of our salvation. It is a one-time act, and is entirely the work of God. Theologians refer to this as positional, declarative, or definitive sanctification.

Having been supernaturally set apart by God from the world, we now belong to Him, we are in a new relationship with Him, cut away from the power of sin and dedicated to God; and thus we love God and His Word, and are enabled to love righteousness and hate sin, and thus yield the fruit of good works.

Progressive sanctification – Only after having properly grasped the primary meaning of sanctification can we then talk about the secondary meaning of sanctification, which is inner moral purity. Unless God first sanctifies us to Himself, we will not be sanctified in our character and conduct. Thus, those who are called holy are also called to become holy (1 Peter 1:14-16). The secondary aspect of sanctification follows the primary aspect of sanctification, and in theology it is known as progressive sanctification.

In the *ordo salutis*, logically speaking, progressive sanctification immediately and inevitably follows regeneration, justification, and adoption. Regeneration, justification and adoption are one-time instantaneous acts of God. In regeneration God makes alive the spiritually dead. In justification God declares just the one who has been regenerated and has repented and believed in Christ. Sanctification, however, is the fruit of justification. It is the continuation of the spiritual life which God began in us at regeneration. It is a progressive process, which continues throughout the life of the believer.

Justification occurs outside the person, where God objectively pronounces the believer as just, without any change in his inward character. But regeneration and sanctification occur inside the person. In regeneration God gives new life to the sinner, giving him a new nature, heart, mind, soul and will; and then in sanctification God inwardly and subjectively changes the character of the person, making him personally and progressively holy. Regeneration, justification, and adoption are entirely the work of God. We are passive, and do not in any way assist God in these. These are monergistic acts of God. Whereas sanctification is a cooperative process, it is a synergistic work, where God works in us and we work also. Sanctification requires our faithfulness, diligence and efforts (Hebrews 12:14).

Regeneration, justification and adoption occur at the beginning of the Christian life, are perfect in this life, and are never repeated. Sanctification on the other hand, continues throughout the life of the believer and is imperfect in this life. Regeneration, justification and adoption are total and equal in all Christians. There aren't believers who are more regenerated than others, or more justified than others, or more beloved children of God than others. But the degree of sanctification varies in Christians, being greater in some and less in others, depending on their level of faith, discipline, diligence and persistence.

“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” (WSC, Q. 35). This is the goal of the Christian life. In 1 John 3:2-3 we have a marvelous promise that one day we will be perfectly conformed to Christ, and this does not result in laziness or idleness; rather, it drives and stirs us to personal holiness. This is what we yearn and hope for, and which will be ours when Christ returns. This amazing promise also confirms that God will fully sanctify us, where we will in practice be what we now are in position before God (Isaiah 14:24; Ezekiel 36:26-29; Romans 8:30; Philippians 1:6). Thus, we are certain that we are now holy, are also being made holy, and will one day be perfectly holy.