



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 180

Sanctification begins at regeneration – Progressive sanctification is the fruit of God’s grace, which begins at regeneration, where God quickens the spiritually dead, implanting new spiritual life in the person, where the person now has a holy disposition, and is enabled to love God and the things of God.

Supernatural work of God – Like all aspects of salvation, God is the author and source of sanctification. Our growth in holiness is a supernatural operation of the triune God. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 we read that the Father sanctifies His people (Hebrews 13:20-21); in Ephesians 5:25-27 we read that Christ sanctifies His bride (John 15:4-5; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:22; Titus 2:14); and in Romans 8:13 we read that the Holy Spirit sanctifies believers (Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 3:14-17).

Particularly the work of the Spirit – In the economy of redemption, God the Father has decreed or planned our redemption, God the Son has accomplished or purchased our redemption, and God the Spirit applies or completes this redemption to us personally. With respect to the application of salvation, it is specifically the Holy Spirit who regenerates sinners, giving them new life and indwelling them (John 3:5-8; 6:63; Romans 8:9-11; Titus 3:5); and likewise, in the Bible we see that the work of sanctification is more specifically ascribed to the Holy Spirit, who directs and strengthens the believers’ growth in holiness. The indwelling Spirit is the agent of sanctification, and as Paul says He is “the Spirit of holiness” (Romans 1:4). Thus, it seems quite fitting that He is named “the Holy Spirit.”

Restoration of God’s image in man – Man was originally made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Man was made as a personal, spiritual, relational, rational, volitional and moral being; to know God, to commune with Him and worship Him; to fellowship with others; to think, reason, learn and make decisions; to have a sense of right and wrong; to share in some of God’s attributes, to be holy, good, righteous, just, and loving; to use his body as an instrument of holiness; and to exercise dominion over creation. In all this man was created to reflect God’s glorious and holy character. This was the original condition that Adam was created in, created in the image of God, and created in a state of moral righteousness. Thus God declared him to be “very good” (Genesis 1:31; Ecclesiastes 7:29). This was the high dignity and calling bestowed upon humanity, as originally created by God.

But when Adam disobeyed God and sinned he immediately died spiritually (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23a), and fell from his original righteousness, and his nature became sinful, and enslaved to sin. The image of God in Adam, and in all humanity, was badly marred and defaced. Man became wholly defiled in all parts of his soul and body, and lost the ability and desire to please God, to mirror His holiness, to obey, serve and glorify Him (Genesis 6:5; John 6:44; Romans 3:10-12; 5:19a; 8:7-8; Ephesians 2:1-3).

Thus, the ultimate goal of redemption is the complete restoration of God’s image in man. This is the plan of God for His people, which He begins in regeneration, and continues in the process of sanctification (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:22-24). In 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 Paul says that believers are being transformed into the image of Christ progressively, and this is the work of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:14-17). As the Spirit performs this inner work, the fruit of holy living becomes more and more manifest in our lives (Galatians 5:22-25). The “fruit of the Spirit” is in reality the moral image of Christ which is ever-increasingly being formed in believers (Galatians 4:19; 1 Corinthians 6:20).

Where the first Adam failed in reflecting God, the last Adam succeeded, with His incarnation, life and death, perfectly obeying and reflecting the Father (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 17:4; 1 Corinthians 15:45, 49). Christlikeness, not deification or divinization, is the ultimate goal of sanctification. The restoration of the image of God in believers has already begun in Christ, and one day it will be fully realized in us, when we will reflect God perfectly in thought, word, and deed, as we were originally created to do.