



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 195

Sanctification affects the whole man – God’s work of sanctification affects the whole man, impacting a person’s body and spirit. The body is the physical and tangible part in man; and the spirit is the non-physical and intangible part in man – consisting of reason, will, conscience, and emotions.

The Bible teaches that all aspects of man’s spirit are impacted by sanctification. Through sanctification a believer’s spiritual knowledge and understanding are progressively renewed and increased (John 6:45; 14:26; 16:13; Romans 12:2; Philippians 1:9; Colossians 1:10; 3:9-10). Sanctification also affects a believer’s will, his decision-making power (Ezekiel 36:25-27; Philippians 2:12-13). God empowers and motivates both our desires and actions, to live the Christian life for His good pleasure. Moreover, as our minds and wills are renewed, our consciences are also properly informed and reinforced, judging our thoughts and actions biblically (1 Timothy 1:18-19; Hebrews 9:14). Sanctification also impacts a believer’s emotions. As the Spirit enables us to continuously put off the old man and put on the new man, the fruit of holy living becomes increasingly evident in our lives (Galatians 5:22-25). This includes the progressive transformation of our attitudes and emotions, where we more and more desire and love that which honors God (Psalm 37:4; Colossians 3:8, 12-15; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Sanctification also affects a believer’s physical body. Even though our bodies are daily growing weaker, wasting away and perishing, and are used by our fallen nature to bring forth sin (1 Corinthians 15:53; 2 Corinthians 4:16), the Bible also teaches that by the power of the Spirit we can and are called to use our bodies to reflect the holiness of God in what we say and do. And though our bodies are growing weaker, they are used by God to display His power and glory (Romans 6:12-13; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 9:27; 2 Corinthians 4:7; 11:30; 12:9; Philippians 1:20). Thus, we need to take care of our bodies, realizing that they are tools or means with which we are to obey God and serve Him in our lives. Thus it is clear that both our body and soul are in the process of being sanctified (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Sanctification will not be complete in this life – Having been regenerated by the Spirit, the believer is no longer the slave of sin but has become the slave of God (Romans 6:11, 22; 1 Peter 2:24). This means that the power and reign which sin had over us have been broken. Nevertheless, the remnants of our sinful nature is still in us, opposing God and waging war against our spiritual nature and the things of God (Galatians 5:16-17). Thus, the normal Christian life is a life of growth in holiness but also a life of continuous conflict with sin, with its successes and failures (Romans 6:12-13; 7:14-25; WCF 13.2).

The level of growth in holiness and struggle with sin will vary from Christian to Christian, depending on many factors, such as the proper use of the means of sanctification provided by God. There will be times of great growth but also times of slow or no growth, or even times of regression or backsliding. But over time when we look back we will see an overall rate or pattern of growth in our holiness.

Though the pollution of sin is gradually cleansed and removed from us, our sanctification will not be complete and perfect in this life, for sin and the struggle with sin will always be present (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Philippians 3:12-14; 1 John 1:8). Nevertheless, by the power and inner work of the Spirit our ultimate triumph is assured, which will only come at our death when we will be completely liberated not only from the pollution but also the presence of sin (WCF 13.3). With respect to our spirits our sanctification will be complete at death, when we will enter the presence of our Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8), join the spirits of the righteous made perfect (Hebrews 12:23), and find eternal rest from our labors and struggles (Revelation 14:13). With respect to our bodies our sanctification will be complete at the return of our Lord, when our bodies will be resurrected imperishable and immortal (1 Corinthians 15:48-57; Philippians 3:20-21). It is only then that our sanctification will be fully realized, when we will perfectly bear the image of the Man of heaven, in body and soul, as we were originally created to do.