

Question Fifteen: What Are Sanctification and Perseverance?*

While conversion and justification are elements of our salvation that take place when we repent and place our faith in the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, they serve as a pattern for how we live the rest of our lives as Christians – our sanctification. Sanctification is a progressive work by God through our continual faith and obedience that helps us overcome sin in our lives and transforms us more and more into the image of Christ.

I. Sanctification

A. Sanctification is a Process

1. Sanctification starts at the moment of salvation.

- a) At the moment of salvation, we are “dead to sin and alive to God” (Rom. 6:11).
- b) We are set free from sin (Rom. 6:18), and sin no longer is our master because we are now under grace (Rom. 6:14).

2. It increases throughout our lives.

- a) During this life, we will never be completely free from sin.

(1) Eccl. 7:20 – There is no one who does good and never sins.

(2) 1 John 1:8 – If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

(3) 1 John 1:9; Luke 11:4 – We are expected to confess our sins when we commit them.

- b) Once we pass from this life, our sanctification will be completed.

(1) No uncleanness can enter into the presence of God (Rev. 21:27); and those who are in heaven are described as possessing spirits that have been made perfect (Heb. 12:23).

(2) Our complete person will experience sanctification at the return of Christ, when Christ transforms our body, as well, into the likeness of his glorious body (Phil. 3:21).

- c) Yet, we still should expect to see a regular increase in our sanctification during this life.

(1) We are being transformed from one degree of glory into another (2 Cor. 3:18).

* The material in this handout is a summary of chapter fifteen, “What are Sanctification and Perseverance?” in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. by Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 99-107.

Question Fifteen: What Are Sanctification and Perseverance?*

(2) We are to display the attitude that Paul did, when he said that he forgets past things and strives toward the goal of God's call to be like Christ (Phil. 3:13-4).

(3) While we aren't given a specific blueprint of what our present sanctification and struggle with sin looks like, we should be present in that struggle and striving towards Christlikeness through faith and repentance.

B. God's Role in Sanctification

1. Like salvation, our sanctification is a work of God accomplished in our lives by his grace (1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20-1).

2. He accomplishes this work through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

a) Sanctification is credited to Him (1 Peter 1:2; and 2 Thess. 2:13).

b) The Spirit is the one who produces fruit in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23) as we "walk by the Spirit" and are "led by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16-8).

C. Our Role in Sanctification

1. While God is the one who does the work of sanctification, He does so through our submission and obedience to His commands.

a) We are to submit our beings to God (Rom. 6:13; Rom. 12:1).

b) This is accompanied by our obedience to God through the "putting to death" the deeds of the flesh, which can only be accomplished by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:13; cf. 12:2).

c) We see both aspects of our and God's involvement in sanctification in Phil. 2:12-13. We can work out our salvation because God gives us the power and strength to do so.

2. God honors our response of faith and obedience in sanctification as seen in the following areas:

a) Bible reading and meditation (Ps. 1:2; Matt. 4:4; John 17:17)

b) Prayer (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6)

c) Worship (Eph. 5:18-20)

* The material in this handout is a summary of chapter fifteen, "What are Sanctification and Perseverance?" in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. by Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 99-107.

Question Fifteen: What Are Sanctification and Perseverance?*

- d) Witnessing (Matt. 28:19-20)
- e) Acts of mercy and justice (Matt. 23:23)
- f) Christian fellowship (Heb. 10:24-25)
- g) Self-control (Gal. 5:23; Titus 1:8)

II. Perseverance

What happens when a “believer” fails in the process of sanctification? Does that person lose their salvation? The answer to these questions is found in the doctrine known as perseverance. Perseverance means that all who are and will truly be saved will “stick it out” (persevere) by faith.

A. The Promise of Jesus – All true Christians will persevere

1. John 6:38-40 – Jesus promises that all who believe in him will experience eternal life and will be raised up at the last day. Further, he says that it is God’s will that He lose nothing of all God has given him (in context this means believers).
2. John 10:27-29 – Those to whom Jesus gives eternal life (those who place their faith in his work) will never be snatched out of his hand and will never perish.

B. The Promise of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14)

1. As believers, we have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.
2. Further, he serves as the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire it in heaven.

C. Our Continuation in Faith – Only those who persevere to the end are truly Christians

1. The evidence that we are truly believers is that we “abide” in Christ’s words or teachings (John 8:31).
2. We are reconciled to God only if we continue in the faith, as evidenced by our continual hope in the Gospel (Col. 1:22-23).
3. Numerous other passages speak of the fact that believers must continue in the faith and overcome (Heb. 3:6, 14; 10:35-6; Rev. 2-3 – the “overcomers”). Those who fail to do so can expect sure judgment in Hell (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31).

* The material in this handout is a summary of chapter fifteen, “What are Sanctification and Perseverance?” in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. by Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 99-107.

Question Fifteen: What Are Sanctification and Perseverance?*

4. This teaching does not mean that we, as believers, won't continue to struggle with sin. But, the point is that we will struggle, i.e. fight against it in our lives through faith and repentance. Those who don't continue in the faith are not and will not ultimately be saved.

III. Assurance

The teaching on perseverance seems to indicate that we can have no real confidence that we will be saved until the end of our lives (Heb. 3:14). Can we have real confidence and assurance that we are saved right now? The New Testament affirms that there is real assurance as we continue to place our faith in Jesus Christ.

A. As we continue to trust Christ for our salvation, we can be assured that He will save us (John 3:16).

“If you have confidence in Christ's work on your behalf, confidence in Christ's ability to take the penalty for your sins and confidence that Christ should let you into heaven based only on his work and not on yours, and if that confidence is currently present in your life, then that confidence is an assurance of your true faith” (Grudem, 105).

B. We also gain assurance from the evidence of God's continuing work in our lives.

1. The Holy Spirit testifies in our lives that we are truly God's children (1 John 4:13).

2. The Holy Spirit will lead us into obedience to God's will (Rom. 8:14).

3. We will manifest the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22-23). The “fruit” here is singular, which means that a true believer will manifest all of these things in their life, not just one or two.

4. A true believer will continue to show a pattern of obedience to Christ's commands and an imitation of his life (1 John 2:4-6).

Salvation is a work accomplished by God through our faith in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Our sanctification is also likewise accomplished by God through our faith. A true believer continues to believe, and this is evidenced by obedience to God's Word.

* The material in this handout is a summary of chapter fifteen, “What are Sanctification and Perseverance?” in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. by Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 99-107.