

Sanctification: What Does the Lord Expect of Us?

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The Bible unequivocally states that we should be completely sanctified with a view to the second coming of Jesus Christ. A further work of grace is needed in our lives to share in this blessing. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians is that the Lord "may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thess. 3:13). On the day when the Lord Jesus will descend from heaven to receive us to Himself He will bring the deceased saints with Him. On that day we must be spiritually worthy and not be ashamed because of our fleshliness.

Let us examine the big difference which sanctification makes in a Christian's life, and also determine how far we have progressed on this way.

1. A pure heart

It is the will of the Lord that His children should not only be saved but also have pure hearts from which virtuous thoughts and desires arise. After having received the blessing of a clean heart we should daily keep our hearts from contamination by sin and fleshly desires as these temptations will continuously strive for our souls: "Keep your hearts with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). If we become careless our pure hearts may be defiled by sin.

We know the example of King David who delighted himself in the Lord but later became the victim of temptation. He desired his neighbour's wife and committed gross sins to get hold of her. In a short period of time he apostatised grievously. But deep remorse came over him after the Lord's prophet confronted him because of his sin, and he confessed it with tears. David realised that he was in a state of rebellion against God and His Word. He was also conscious of the fact that the Lord took His Holy Spirit from his predecessor, Saul, because of him having despised the commands of the Lord and wilfully living in sin again.

David fervently prayed: "Blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, o God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your generous Spirit" (Ps. 51:9-12). He realised that his heart had

become impure and defiled. David was spiritually completely restored and again proclaimed the praises of the Lord from a pure heart. Afterwards, he carefully guarded against temptations (Ps. 19:12-14).

Have you already prayed the prayer for a pure heart – for the first time or in renewing your commitment? The hearts of many Christians are characterised by sinful desires – not only for other women but also for wealth, prestige and pleasure. These thoughts become so deeply entrenched through the force of habit that they will ultimately dominate all your thoughts, decisions and actions. They will choke your spiritual life as love for the world and love for God cannot coexist (1 John 2:15). God can only truly be worshiped from an undivided heart.

A heart which is cleansed by the blood of the Lamb and filled with the Holy Spirit instils completely new values within you. It helps you to set your mind on the things above, where Christ intercedes for us. This is the only way in which we can achieve victory over earthly, materialistic desires. The state of your heart is revealed to you by the things which you daily meditate upon, particularly when you relax and give free reign to your thoughts. When your deepest desires are honourable and in the interest of God's kingdom, they will also be the focus of your prayers. Paul says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:6-8).

Ensure that the thoughts of your heart are always acceptable to the Lord. That will only be possible if you keep the words of the Lord in your heart and probe their deep significance day and night. The psalmist says: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You... Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end... Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things" (Ps. 119:11,33,36-37). In His Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). They will walk in the light of His

presence. Paul said to the young evangelist: "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

A pure heart under the control of God's Spirit is the secret of a clean and fruitful life. Apart from the sanctification which the Lord does for us we also have the obligation to give our full collaboration in the practical realisation of holiness. We must flee from sin and pursue the things of the Lord. "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

2. A Spirit-controlled life

The Lord does not only call us to repentance but also to holiness: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification... He who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 4:3,8). A life under the control of God's Spirit is the only way in which we can overcome the obstruction of our old, fleshly nature: "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:16-17). This is a spiritual checkmate position.

How can this obstruction be removed? By the cross of Christ. He did not only die to pay the penalty for our sins, but also enabled us to die to the old life and be resurrected with Him in a new life. Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I [the old Paul] who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). He was crucified to the world and the world to him (Gal. 6:14).

We take this step of full identification with Christ's death in a complete surrender. Confess and forsake all sins of which the Holy Spirit convicts you and also surrender your old nature to be crucified. Then pray that the Holy Spirit will fill you and imbue you with the new nature of Christ. He will do His work of renewing your life and conforming it to the image of Christ. That is also what Paul asked of the Ephesians: "...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24).

What happens if a Christian does not take this step by faith? He then remains a carnal Christian who leads a life of falling and rising. Paul said to believers who stagnated spiritually and did not walk by the Spirit: "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1). They were full of envy, strife and divisions, and consequently did not manifest the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

When such people realise that something is lacking in their lives, they often resort to techniques such as the casting out of demons, the breaking of generation curses, or inner healing, in an effort to remove supposed impediments to spiritual growth. In so doing they commit a serious error of judgement as they implicitly reject the all-sufficiency of Christ's deliverance which is based upon His atonement on the cross. Children of the Lord cannot be demon-possessed, neither are they afflicted by the sins of former generations.

What a young Christian *does* need is crucifying the flesh and the filling of the Holy Spirit. That is the experience of sanctification which follows justification. If he denies himself and daily takes up his cross, the Lord will imbue him with a heavenly life through His Spirit, and that will be the prevailing principle of life within him. That does not mean that he will never make mistakes or sin, but he will immediately confess his sins to the Lord Jesus and forsake them, and will therefore not become a slave of sin.

3. The reforming of our whole life

The Lord's call to holiness includes every aspect of our lives: "As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Pet. 1:15). Paul further elaborates on the full extent of sanctification in order to avoid any doubt on this subject: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (1 Thess. 5:23-24). He can and will do a complete work in us.

The areas of our life which are to be sanctified include our spirit, soul *and* body, i.e. our entire existence as humans. The **spiritual life** of a Christian is characterised by faith, hope and love. When he is wholly sanctified all these attributes are considerably enhanced. We should have a strong and unwavering faith, being built up in our most holy faith (Jude v. 20), lest we remain people with little faith who are tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). We must have a firm faith and strong trust in the Lord Jesus, not only for His second coming but also for the provision of our daily needs. "...Rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). We must also become perfect in our love as the Holy Spirit pours out the love of God in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). We should be grounded and rooted in this love, so that it can control all our actions.

The **soul** of man includes his will, mind and emotions. Through sanctification we are enabled to subject ourselves completely to the will of the Lord and to pursue it single-mindedly. Paul counsels the Colossians to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12). The Lord wants to sanctify our mind so we can have the mind of Christ (Col. 2:16). The Holy Spirit helps us to achieve this goal by giving us enlightened eyes of our understanding to be able to know what our spiritual heritage is (Eph. 1:18). Our emotions also come under the control of the Holy Spirit to experience the joy of the Lord in our lives and to obtain the spiritual strength and self-control to resist negative, fleshly emotions. Our entire temperament should be that of a true Christian.

The **body** of a person is also an important part of his sanctification. Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:1-2). We should take care of our bodies, keep them clean, fit and healthy, and present our members as instruments of righteousness in the service of God. Never conform to the world, including dishonourable forms of clothing, eating and drinking habits. Paul asks, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). There are people who defile this temple by unhealthy and excessive eating habits, the use of drugs, including tobacco and

liquor, the bringing on of tattoos, etc. Such people are not examples of holiness as they harm their own lives and set a bad example to others.

Holiness is not something which we can enforce upon a person from the outside by instituting legalistic rules, etc. We should proclaim the biblical doctrine of sanctification as only then would people behave differently because of changed inner convictions. A spiritual inclination should be instilled in them to conform their attitudes, dispositions and actions to the image of their Saviour.

4. Victory in the struggle

Through sanctification we are empowered to prevail against temptations of the Evil One since the power of the Holy Spirit is also at our disposal in this regard: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:10-11).

Christians who are not filled with the Holy Spirit are powerless to contend against the temptations and attacks of Satan. They sometimes say that we are defenceless against sin and temptation, and that the Lord has destined us to remain sinners until we go to heaven one day. This is a completely wrong perception as we have been called upon to be more than conquerors in the Name of Jesus Christ here on earth.

"God is faithful, who will allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). The Holy Spirit helps us to escape temptations. However, if we are not filled with the Holy Spirit and therefore do not walk in the Spirit, but instead we grieve and resist the Holy Spirit, we will not have the power to prevail against temptations. Do you live in the power and victory of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit also equips us to handle all problems, afflictions and tribulation which may come across our way, including illness. These things sometimes come upon us to test our faith: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (Jas. 1:12).

The Holy Spirit enables believers who are fully surrendered to Him to remain faithful to the Lord under the most trying circumstances. When they are persecuted because of their faith they are not overcome with thoughts of vengeance but rather pray for their persecutors. Some Christians are painfully tested at their work, by children who have apostatised, by financial setbacks, accidents or diseases which afflict them. In all these things they can still be more than conquerors if the power of the Holy Spirit is working in their lives, unrestricted by carnal attitudes. In some cases the Lord delivers people from their diseases and distress, but in other cases He gives them strength to endure and to keep on bearing their cross. Paul also suffered from personal afflictions, but the Lord did not heal him and ensured him that: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Do not become despondent when you have to enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations, but persevere in good faith to the end. Some people backslide and then become embittered against their circumstances, family members, society and even against the Lord Himself (Heb. 12:15). We must persevere in faith, even when everything around us becomes dark: "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls" (Heb. 12:3).

5. Perfect in love

Sanctification increases the level of God's agape love in our lives and enables us to actively demonstrate it in our attitudes, relationships and works. Are the characteristics of God's love evident in your life? "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

All saved people do have a measure of God's love in them but not all of them are filled with it. Love is the fruit of the Spirit and we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). What will a person do who is filled with God's love?

- He will have a love for God's Word and be a devoted Bible student: "Whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him" (1 John 2:5).

- He will take delight in his fellow brethren, visit them, support them, and serve the Lord together with them: "If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us" (1 John 4:12).
- He will look forward to the second coming of the Lord Jesus and be able to give account of his life before the judgement seat of Christ with boldness: "In this respect love has been made perfect among us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgement" (1 John 4:17). Christians do not appear in the final judgement before the great white throne, but will appear before the judgement seat of Christ after the rapture where their works will be tested. He who has built with wood, hay, and straw after his conversion – that is a believer who has not done things that have value for eternity – will appear before the Lord empty-handed, saved as through fire (1 Cor. 3:11-15). Through the filling of the Holy Spirit and the practical expression of God's love we will have boldness to stand before the heavenly Judge as the fruit of the Spirit will, by the grace of God, bring rewards. Paul says, "Each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Cor. 3:8). To successful disciples will be said: "Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities" (Luke. 19:17).

Are you filled with the love which God pours out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit? If you are not filled with God's Spirit there will be very little evidence of His divine love in your life.

6. Set apart for service

Sanctification may also be translated as "set apart for the service of the Lord" and therefore indicates an obligation to serving the Lord. There is no true service to the Lord possible without the prior filling of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus told His disciples that they first had to wait for this essential spiritual equipment before starting with their ministry: "Tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Shortly before His ascension He repeated the promise on spiritual empowerment and sanctification: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1:8).

There are many people who work for the Lord without having a testimony of sanctification and filling with the Holy Spirit. They rely on their own intellectual and fleshly abilities to do the work. Paul was also an educated man but he guarded against trying to preach the gospel in his own strength. He said to the church in Corinth: "My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:4).

Make sure that the anointing of the Holy Spirit rests upon you before preaching the gospel to others. Human arguments without the power and conviction of the Holy Spirit will not yield any lasting results.

7. A wedding garment

Sanctification is often mentioned in association with the second coming. The Lord Jesus wants to prepare us for this meeting by sanctifying us: “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present the church to Himself in glorious splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such things – that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27; *Amplified Bible*).

The Lord Jesus made provision for sanctification as a second work of grace by His sacrifice on the cross and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This promise is accomplished on the level of co-operative righteousness as we are called upon to be fellow-workers of God in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 3:9). If we have the hope on Christ’s coming we must purify ourselves just as He is pure (1 John 3:3). That means that through the power of the Holy Spirit we should dedicate ourselves to the Lord and also in a disciplined manner do things that befit repentance. These works will be manifested as a wedding garment. John says:

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev. 19:7-8).

The righteous acts of the saints are the fruit of the Holy Spirit in a fully surrendered life. These works represent the fabric of the wedding garment. Because of their salvation all Christians have a garment of righteousness, which is the guarantee of our faith. But not all of them have a wedding garment as they did not build with gold, silver or precious stones on the foundation, Jesus Christ, but rather with wood, hay and straw. The high calling of God in Christ Jesus is to be a member of the bridal congregation of the Lord Jesus. To this end, sanctification is indispensable.

Will you appear before the heavenly Bridegroom without spot or wrinkle? Spots refer to contamination by sin in your life, of which you have not yet been cleansed. Wrinkles in your wedding garment are folds. Maybe you don't work on this garment and stored it away in a chest of drawers where it will become creased. We must work on our relationship with the Lord Jesus and daily dedicate ourselves to become more holy and available for service. A life which is under the full control of the Holy Spirit will abundantly produce the righteous acts of the saints.