

Sanctification is Christ's Work

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[0 : 00] I'll be reading Hebrews 13 verses 20 and 21. We'll do this trusting that it's God's inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, sufficient word for you and me, his people.

Hebrews 13, 20 and 21. Now, may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do his will.

Working in you what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Please be seated. Let's pray.

Oh, Lord, please help us to understand this glorious promise. Please help us to behold Jesus Christ as you've described him in this wonderful passage.

[1 : 34] Lord, we pray that each one that you have brought here by your sovereign providence will learn today to rest more in Christ, to trust more in him.

And to be encouraged, Lord, by the promises that he who began a good work in us will see it through to completion for your glory, for Christ's sake and for our good. We pray. Amen.

Amen. Well, some of us here, it's possible that we don't trust God because we still think somewhere deep down in our mind or our heart that there's a catch.

Our fallen minds, our own sin in our hearts, and probably also because of bad experiences, it makes us suspicious of God.

We might be thinking that the gospel is like someone coming up to you with a cardboard box and inside that box is the cutest boxer puppy you have ever seen.

[2 : 42] And they're going to give it to you and they say it's yours. It's totally free. Just receive it. I want this puppy to have a good home. You feel chosen and happy. And then that next morning at 3 a.m., that free puppy has you awake, cleaning up all kinds of messes.

Your rug is destroyed. Your sofa is destroyed. Your shoe is destroyed. And now you've got to take him to the hospital or the vet and pay about \$400 for this free puppy.

You didn't pay anything to receive the gift. And now you're stuck with an expensive, exhausting labor that you were not prepared for, nor did you sign up for.

And it's understandable that we could feel suspicious. We've heard, you know, the words, God loves you, trust in Jesus. And then there's a part of us just waiting for the catch.

We've all been probably baited and switched on a lot of different ways. You know, you're offered something that seems good and shiny. The minute you accept it, it's got the barb and the hook.

[3 : 52] And it's worse than what you started off with. Specifically, in our understanding of salvation, we view the beginning of a salvation to be justification.

God declares you're righteous. But for many of us, the catch can sometimes feel like everything that gets piled on after that. In what we call, what the Bible calls sanctification.

Being set apart, being sanctified, being made holy by God. You've maybe even heard it taught that when you're justified, when God declares you righteous, it's all of his power and his obedience.

And that's right. And someone came up with the term monergism to describe that. It's one sided energy. It's all of God. And that's right. That's what the Bible teaches. But then a very dangerous teaching has crept into the church that I see in this with more and more clarity, though I'm still learning it.

But I want to do my best to declare something with authority and also at the same time invite you to weigh this out. Study the scriptures for yourself. Let this be an ongoing discussion that we have.

[5 : 06] Because what we are taught then is that sanctification to become more like Christ is not by God's energy and power. It's by your energy, your power.

That's what we're taught. And that's been called synergism. I want to encourage you right now, as you study this, stop using the word synergism to describe sanctification.

I think the reason it's dangerous is because it appeals to our flesh. Our flesh will so quickly hold on to that, that God is the author of my salvation.

But I must be the finisher of my salvation. Haven't you felt that? And it's easy then for me to blame the preacher, blame a church or a system of doctrine. But it's the reality.

It's it's my own flesh. My legalism, my pride wants to latch on to that. We want to twist the words of that beautiful, simple hymn. We want to say, it was grace.

[6 : 03] That started my salvation. But work must bring me home. Isn't that what our flesh wants to do? My proposition for us today, brothers and sisters, beloved congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's this. Sanctification is Christ's work. Sanctification is Christ's work also. And I'd like to walk through four reasons from our passage today.

Number one, because of who he is. Number two, because of what he does. Number three, because of how he does it. And finally, number four, because of why he does it.

Sanctification is Christ's work. Will you entertain and ponder this proposition with me? Let's go to our first one. Number one, sanctification is Christ's work because of who he is.

It's Christ's work because of who he is. Look at verse 20. We're told wonderful things about God, the Savior.

[7 : 09] I'd like to show you three. He is the God of peace. He's the God of power. And I'll argue that he's the God of providence from these first few words.

Jesus Christ, truly man, truly God, is the God of peace. It's God who brings shalom. The book of Hebrews is written in which language?

It's confusing because it's called Hebrews, but it's written to Christians who were Jewish, but it's written in Greek. And so he uses the word in Greek for peace.

But he's speaking to a Jewish audience, and this is their greeting that God is the God of what is it in Hebrew? Shalom. It's the God of shalom. God who brings wholeness and reconciliation.

That's what shalom is. He's the God of peace. But then he says that this peace comes through violence, through the blood and the powerful resurrection of the one who brings peace.

[8 : 18] For the Greeks, the thought of peace often simply meant like for us just an absence of war. But the Jews would have had that much deeper Old Testament anchoring of this term.

It's a God who puts all things in their proper order. It's shalom on a cosmic level, a restoration of God's intended design.

And it's through this covenant that God repairs what's been fractured. The relationships that have been out of order are now made right by an everlasting covenant by the blood of this great shepherd.

By calling God the God of peace. He's calling God the great reconciler who is restoring order to the universe.

Starting with Christ the head and his body. All Christians who are brought under him. So the God of peace delivers his peace through Jesus Christ the Son.

[9 : 23] And only through Jesus Christ the Son can sinners like you and I know the God of peace and enjoy shalom, a restored relationship with him. So Jesus is the God of peace.

And secondly, Jesus Christ truly man, truly God is the God of power. It's the God of power. Look at the next words.

He brought up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Literally to lead up from a lower place to a higher place. Jesus Christ is described using this term that was used for people on ships, you know, nautical ships going from one place to the other.

Being led up, directed. He pictured these ships at nighttime following the one ship safe to the harbor to make it through the storm. That's how Jesus was led up from the depths of death to the highest exaltation at the right hand of God the Father.

It's the powerful work of God through the person, the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

It's the same power of the resurrection that is being blessed now in the people in Hebrews 13.

[10 : 39] He ties the bringing up of the resurrection to the blood of Christ because the blood of the everlasting covenant is what was shed and considered acceptable by God who brought Jesus back from the dead.

The reason these are linked is because the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the receipt, the proof, the confirmation that the payment of his perfect life and his torturous death was accepted by the holy God.

And so Jesus Christ is not only the author, but the powerful finisher of our sanctification of our full salvation. God is the God of peace and God is the God of power.

The third reason of who God is, Jesus Christ, truly man, truly God, is that he is the God of providence, the God of providence. Look at how Jesus is described next.

That great shepherd of the sheep. This language is so heartwarming to us because it calls to mind some of our favorite promises.

[11:53] You know, Jesus and I think it's John 10. My sheep know my voice. They follow me, which reminds us of Psalm 23. Our shepherd leads us into still waters. He refreshes us.

He feeds us. And when you would own these lands, a bunch of cattle or sheep, you'd put them out on all these different pastures. You rotate them around each little flock that could be counted in number had a shepherd.

But overseeing all of those little separate individual flocks was the great shepherd, the one who would give a report to the king. We saw this in first Samuel. I saw how the chief herdsman.

So all the other herdsman report to Saul and report to the chief herdsman and he reports to the king so that everyone is accounted for because the chief shepherd will make sure of that.

The Bible says we all like sheep went astray, but but the chief shepherd, it's God himself through Jesus, took us who are wandering away on our own. And he called us by his voice.

[12:52] He turned us around and he causes us to instinctively follow him. What a better picture of providence. There's nothing I can think of that would cover it all better than the chief shepherd.

Think of what a shepherd does for the sheep. The sheep will be afraid. They won't lay down. They won't relax unless all of their needs are met.

And the chief shepherd must provide for everything. If the chief shepherd doesn't get them to the stream, they'll die of thirst. If he doesn't protect them in the middle of the night, they'll get devoured. Sheep are helpless.

And that's what the Bible calls you and me. This image of God through Jesus Christ being the chief shepherd is describing his provision, his providence over us.

Our confession of faith in chapter five, paragraph one says, God, the good creator of all things in his infinite power and wisdom, does uphold, direct, dispose and govern all creatures and things from the greatest, even to the least by his most wise and holy providence.

[14:04] There might have been one word in that list that the verb that stuck out is dispose. What does that mean? In this time period, that word dispose is a perfect word in English.

It means God orders, arranges, places, turns and distributes all according to his will. So think about this.

What's true of God in creation, what's true of God in our justification must also continue to be true in our sanctification. Some of you have studied logic.

Some of you middle schoolers or high schoolers. And so we can set it up with two statements that are both true. If they're both true, then the conclusion, if the argument is sound, must be true. The first statement I want you to consider is this.

The major premise. Doctrines of the creator's providence, which we just read, are foundational for all of the creator's dealings with his creatures. Is that true?

[15:05] I see your heads are nodding. OK, God is the creator. Everything else is creaturely. And when we're talking about a doctrine relating to God dealing with creatures, the most important thing we need to remember is he is creator.

And it's his providence that governs all his dealings with creatures. The second premise is this.

Sanctification is a doctrine, a teaching of the creator dealing with creatures that he has redeemed. It's still the creator dealing with creatures. That's what sanctification is. If those two statements are true, consider this conclusion. Therefore, the doctrine of divine providence, God's providence, is foundational for rightly discussing the doctrine of sanctification as well.

What that means is that he's the chief shepherd. He's arranging all things. He's providing in every way needed to accomplish even our sanctification.

As the good shepherd, he knows us. He calls us. He feeds us. He protects us. He leads us. He cares for us. He brings us back a time and time again when we need it.

[16:16] And our chief shepherd will see us all the way home because of who he is. He is the God of peace. He's the God of power.

And he's the God of providence. Well, that's the first argument. Sanctification is Christ's work because of who he is. Number two, sanctification is Christ's work because of what he does. Not only because of who he is, but sanctification is also Christ's work because of what he does. Notice how this passage began with a request.

He says, now may the God of peace. He's not issuing a command to the church. It's for the church to read. But he's saying it almost as a prayer.

May God do this. He's not telling church, you need to go complete this. Instead, he's relying on God to give the church what will be needed for God to complete it.

[17:20] It will happen by God's own power. Where did he learn this? Well, by the Holy Spirit, ultimately. But it doesn't contradict any other part of scripture.

In fact, Christ set the example to pray in this way. Think of John 17, verse 17. Jesus prays to the Father. Father, sanctify my disciples completely.

Sanctify them by your truth. Christ prayed that God would sanctify his people. And this is a highly practical expression. He says, Lord, make each one of these complete.

That's what he's saying. He's saying, may they be equipped. And that word equipped could be stated more like may they be perfected. It's practical because it's the same word used in Matthew 421, talking about the nets of the fishermen.

They were there equipping their nets or making their nets complete, perfecting their nets. It can mean mending something that was broken. That's what he's asking for the church, that God would do that in their lives.

[18:29] It's also used of a medical doctor, a physician setting a bone that got put out of place, setting it right. May they be equipped for every good work. May you put that shoulder back in place so that they can carry on with what's your will for them to do.

So sanctification is pictured for us as a repairing process. But God is the one doing the mending, the repairing, the equipping.

God is healing what was torn. He's realigning what was out of order. And he's putting his church and every Christian in a place to be healthy and whole in Christ so that God's will will be accomplished through them.

Then he will be the one causing believers to do every good work. It reminds me of Philippians 1.6. Paul wrote, I'm confident of this very thing that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Because it's God who is the one who works in his church what is well-pleasing in his sight. That's the phrase. He working in you, church, what is well-pleasing to him.

[19:42] God is in the active, present sense, continuous, ongoing action from God. Not just God fixed it once and sent you away and gave you some space.

But God is continually, actively producing and energizing right desires and right actions for his people. He is working in you what is well-pleasing.

Sanctification is Christ's work because of what God does. And that's what he does. The third reason is this.

Sanctification is Christ's work because of how he does it. Sanctification is Christ's work because of how he does it. Notice how it's a triune God working upon his people.

He works his will and his people beginning from the Father through the Son and by the power of the Spirit. God the Father is the subject of the sentence. He's the one doing the equipping and the working.

[20:45] God the Father is the ultimate source of grace, reconciliation and peace. But the kindness of God the Father is channeled exclusively through Jesus Christ.

He's the mediator between God and man. Notice the words next in verse 21. It's through the blood of the everlasting covenant. And it's through Jesus Christ.

The blood of the everlasting covenant. Christ shed his blood in one moment in time in history. But the benefits of his shed blood, the benefits of the work of Christ for his people are everlasting.

They never stop. Jesus Christ on the cross fulfilled the terms of God's own covenant for his people. He bought his people with a price.

It's the legal ground upon which God acts in the lives of his believers, of his people, his followers. We are not our own. We are bought with a price.

[21 : 50] And because we belong to God, God is going to see to completion this wonderful work of salvation. There's a wonderful interplay here. He says God is working in you to do his will.

It's both God's sovereign action and also the human response to God. We will be doing it, but we'll be doing it as a consequence of God working in us.

God is doing in us. And then we will go and do what he has made us do, what he has initiated. It's God's internal energizing work that's the primary cause, the first motion in our sanctification.

But it's a continuous first motion, always energizing, always keeping us, always preserving us. And it doesn't bypass the human will or override it.

Instead, he works through us as human beings. He persuades us. God will show us what's lovely. He'll make us see a work that we would have never chosen to do in our own flesh.

[22 : 59] And he'll cause us to be his instrument to do this in a way that we don't get any of the glory for it. It's for his glory. It's not even us doing it. Ultimately, it's Christ doing it through people like us.

Hebrews 12, 14, I think, is another passage that comes to mind. How does this work where God commands and initiates and sees that it will happen, but it happens through human agents like us? Hebrews 12, 14 commands the church to pursue holiness without which no man can see God. And the idea of pursuing something is like chasing it down.

You know, kids, you like to play tag. And if someone tags you and then runs away, you have to pursue them. And so even this command, pursue holiness, pursue Christ. Even the command to follow hard after Christ is a secondary means.

It's an instrument God is using. And as we read these words, pursue holiness, the spirit causes me to think of these words and think of Christ who's gone before me.

[24 : 04] And think how I can't accomplish any holiness of my own. But his command to follow Christ, pursuing Christ is the very means God uses to then energize me to take one step closer to Christ each time.

And then I look back and I say, I took a step of obeying Christ by faith. Even the desire to do that, the energy to take that step, even that was from the Lord. But Proverbs 16, 9 says that it is God who directs the steps of his people.

There's other verses we need to consider as well and pull in here. Colossians 1, 29. Paul says, I labor, striving. But then he says right away in the same breath, how do I labor?

How do I strive? It's according to God working in me mightily that I do this. Philippians 2, 12 tells the church, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

But when he says this to a gathered congregation in Philippi, it's in the plural. He's saying local congregation, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

[25 : 16] And how does the church do this in the plural? How do we do this collectively? Well, we obey what Christ has commanded. We gather in his name on the Lord's day. We read his word.

We preach his word. We pray. We sing. We're working out. We're understanding. We're teaching and admonishing one another about our salvation. We're letting it be worked into us.

And Christ is the one doing this to a gathered body for his will. So that verse should never be put back on us as a principle of works to the individual.

It's Christ who accomplishes our sanctification. But he does it through those very means, those very instructions that he's given in his word. Ephesians 2, 10 says that we are his workmanship.

We are created. It's something that we don't have any control over. He does this in us. We're created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[26 : 20] You see how God started it. God prepared the very good works. You did them through Christ. God gets all the glory. And this is why he created you.

This is why he called you. Why you're part of his new creation order. It's because these things will happen. He's the one that's ensured that they will in his own way. Your obedience and mine and sanctification is directed by God.

It's God who inclines us to obey. God who effectually animates us to obey him. It's God in his providence and his pure power is working in us.

He doesn't just give us a push on the path of sanctification and expect us to go. Instead, he is our very internal energy source. In him, we live and move and have our being.

It's all from him and to him and through him and for his glory. The word here in our passage that God is working in you to do his will.

[27 : 26] Working in. It's a term for manufacturing. It's like a factory picture, you know, of you set up a shop. Jesus was a builder.

So you can picture it like a little assembly line. We're going to put it all together. And up comes this wonderful piece of work. And it's God who is working in you. Manufacturing, producing in you the right desires and actions in real time.

So when we obey, we are operating because God is first operating inside of us. It's a cooperation. It's not without us. But it's impossible without God sustaining it every step of the way.

Well, the fourth and final reason I want to bring before you today. It's not only how Christ sanctifies us, but it's also why he does this.

Sanctification must be Christ's work because of why he does this. Why does Christ sanctify us? Not because God foresaw us as people who would choose to obey him if he had left us to ourselves.

[28 : 35] Second Thessalonians 2.13 says, Because God from the beginning chose you for salvation. From the beginning he chose you to save you and me.

For salvation through sanctification by the spirit and belief in truth. He didn't see anything in us. Then why did he do it?

Why is it that he chose to save and sanctify us as people? And our verse today, verse 21 says it was for his own glory. For Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. If sanctification depended on your energy or mine, if it were synergistic like that, then that would have to mean that our final salvation, even to some small degree, would depend on you or me.

Instead, this verse says it was for Jesus Christ and to him alone be all the glory. Why did God save us? Why does he sanctify us? It's also because of the love of God through Jesus Christ.

[29 : 48] Ephesians 5.25 says, Christ so loved the church that he gave himself for her. Why? That he might sanctify her and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.

Why is sanctification Christ's work? It's because God is faithful. He knows. He calls. He feeds. He protects. He leads. He cares for. He brings back his sheep.

He does this by his most wise and holy providence. God upholds, directs, governs, orders, arranges, places, turns, and distributes all things for the sanctification, for the salvation of his people.

1 Thessalonians 5.23 says, 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 the Lord Jesus Christ, who calls you.

He who calls you is faithful and he also will do it. Sanctification is Christ's work because of why he does it, and he does it for his own glory.

[30 : 59] Don't let the enemy or your own flesh deceive you. We can think that we're like a tone deaf beggar on the street. Doesn't have any sense of music or notes or what sounds good.

And we can think that it's like God handed us this broken violin and said, you better play that violin beautifully now or else you're out. You have no place in my kingdom.

And if that's how salvation is, then we just stand there trembling with this broken violin and it's impossible to complete what he expects of us. And that's not what any of these verses, any of these promises in scripture say that salvation is.

That's not how we can think about sanctification. Instead, God gives this violin and then he patiently comes over and fixes it, so to speak, and puts wonderful strings on it.

And then he takes our hands and he teaches us and he touches our ears and heals us. And then he's the one making the music and playing that violin through the instrument of this beggar holding it here.

[32 : 11] And the sound is beautiful and you can hear it and appreciate it. But you look back, you get no glory for anything good that God did. He's the one who gave you a desire now to enjoy it and to learn more from him.

And it's all for his glory. He's the one producing all the music in our lives. Oh, dear brothers and sisters. Sanctification is not a struggle to produce a melody to impress God with. It's yielding your life to him. It's throwing yourself on him and confessing, I have nothing of my own. I cannot do a single good work by my own energy or power.

My own desires, Lord, won't be enough. Please give me, Lord, what I lack. Lord, you know what's well-pleasing of my life today.

And I pray, Lord, that you will cause me and arrange everything for me to do what is pleasing to you. Because sanctification is your work in Jesus Christ, not mine.

[33 : 23] I want to encourage us one more time by hearing this because it's a blessing. It's a benediction. It's something that should just wash over the church time and time again and cause us to trust in Christ for our sanctification.

Now, may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Let's pray and thank the Lord. Oh, God, we confess we are nothing. You are everything.

Lord, we confess we need mending. We need being set right, Lord. And only you can do that.

Father, we pray that you'll teach us to lay down our pride, lay down our self-reliance.

We pray, Lord, that you will stir up in our hearts a desire to follow you like a sheep following you as the good shepherd, that we won't hold back anything from you, Lord, and suspect something of you that is our own sin and flesh, accusations against you.

[34 : 48] Help us to believe, Lord, sincerely that you are trustworthy. Lord, with you there is salvation and it truly is free salvation, as we read in Isaiah 55.

For all who are hungry, you give freely food to eat. For all who are thirsty, we come to you. There's no bait and switch. There's nothing hidden. There's no burden.

You're going to lay back on your people, Lord. We pray that you will establish your people. You will see through to completion this good work that you began in each individual life that's here today and in this congregation as a whole.

We ask this for Christ's sake alone. Amen. Amen.