

Brackenhurst 5 October 2008 pm
The Process of Sanctification

Welcome & Notices

Scripture:

1 Thes 4:1-12

John 17:6-21

Message

INTRODUCTION

- Last week we spoke about Justification and said that it is the wicked who are justified
 - And Peter used the illustration that it is ‘just as if’ I had never sinned.
- It’s not that God stops seeing our sins, but in fact he sees them, and in spite of that, chooses to forgive us our sin.
 - There is nothing that anyone can do to earn that forgiveness, we simply need to accept that relationship between us and God that Jesus has made for us through faith.
 - * As Wesley said, this is the basis for all our hope as Christians.
- And so as we continue this week looking at some of the theological words we throw around we look tonight at the word ‘sanctification’
 - And as we speak about these words we are reflecting on Wesley’s theology as well
 - * So maybe now is a good time to remind you of the four pillars of Methodism
 - Four statements upon which our Methodist Theology was built by John Wesley
 - * All people need to be saved
 - * All people can be saved
 - * All people can know that they are saved
 - * And all people can be saved to the uttermost
- Now I want to go back this evening and look at the origin of the doctrine of Justification — that’s covered under the idea of all people need to be saved — because our sanctification is so closely tied up with this
 - So the starting point is a recognition that while men and women were created good, in the image of God
 - * In fact, created perfectly

- And to the perfect man and woman were given a perfect law
 - * A law which would have ensured fullness of life in community with God and each other
- And more than that were given the ability to obey it perfectly and to live a life of holiness and happiness in paradise, somehow God's perfect creation failed to live up to God's promise and hope for them.
- From the moment of their disobedience, they tasted, not the juicy flesh of a freshly picked fruit, but tasted the death brought about by a life of disobedience to God.
 - So the origin of the doctrine of Justification has its origin in the very first chapters of the Bible
 - * The Bible is a book described by Daniel Erlander as God's plan of salvation for the entire universe
 - As the earliest men and women try to explain why things are in such a mess and why a world that should be perfect is in fact so difficult and so painful
- The doctrine of Justification is first and foremost a recognition that we are not who we were created to be, but that God has made a way for us to become who he made us to be.
 - That way begins with Justification in which God offers to us a relationship through Jesus Christ as he accepts us just as we are
- But justification is just the beginning of the journey because while God accepts us just as we are, wicked, ungodly and sinners
 - he loves us too much to leave us that way and he is continually encouraging us and reaching out to us to reform us into the image that we were created in in the first place
- And the word that we use to describe that process is "Sanctification"
 - The process of being made holy.
 - And the process of being saved to the uttermost: to becoming perfect
 - * Justification is what Jesus does for us; Sanctification is what the Holy Spirit does within us as he works together with us to make us ever more like God.
- What can we learn about sanctification tonight?
 - It is the will of God that we should be sanctified
 - Sanctification is for those who love God
 - Sanctification in the work of the Holy Spirit

(1) It is the will of God that we should be sanctified

- The first thing that we need to understand about the doctrine of sanctification is that God wants us to be sanctified
 - God wants us to be made holy.
 - * We read just now as Paul writes to the Thessalonians, he said, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.” (1 Thess 4:3)
- Why would God want us to be sanctified, or to be holy?
 - Because God is holy! And we are made in God’s image!
 - But in spite of that, as we learnt last week, “All have sinned and fallen short of God (Rom 3:21)
- Now God justifies us and makes us as though we had never sinned, but you and I know that just because we are justified we do not stop sinning
 - And God doesn’t want us just to be justified, but he wants us to actually become righteous
 - * He wants us to be recreated in his image
 - * He wants us to be perfect.
- I don’t know if you do anything that is creative? DIALOGUE!!!
 - I think you probably do because God is creative and we are created in God’s image
 - * So maybe you compose music, or you write, or you take photographs, you write software, or you paint or sculpture or sew, or build models or cook or bake
- Any of those creative things that you do
 - And you do something and you think, “That should have come out better”
- You give your life to a project and you work on it day and night and when you finish up with it somehow it didn’t come out quite the way you planned
 - The music piece you composed doesn’t sound quite as good as you hoped it would
 - the meal you made for your boyfriend — or girlfriend — was a bit of flop
- Justification is a bit like when you say to your partner it doesn’t matter if the meal didn’t come out quite right, I still love you
 - Sanctification is when you say I know it didn’t come out right but I love you so much I want to do it better and better until it’s perfect
- And this is what God wants for us — he wants us everyday to become more and more Godlike.
 - This is why Jesus prays for his disciples and us, just before he goes to the cross, that all will be truly sanctified, that they may taste the fullness of life lived with their creator
- Sanctification is being made righteous.

- We were created in the image of God which is broken through the fall; it is God's will that that image be restored
 - * and we become the people we were created to be.

(2) Sanctification is for those who love God

- Now this is a key difference between Justification and Sanctification:
 - Justification is for those whom God loves
 - * And that's everybody, but especially the wicked and the wretched.
 - Wesley describes them as such:
 - * "the ungodly of every kind and degree; and none but the ungodly".
 - and there is nothing that one has to do to be justified, it is already done through the work of Jesus.
- Sanctification, on the other hand, is for those who love God
 - It is for those who have already accepted the relationship that is created through justification
- Paul writes, he says

"Finally, brothers — and sisters — we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more." (1 Thess 4:1)
- The passage, in the NIV of the Bible is entitled "Living to please God"
 - You're not going to want live to please God if you don't love God.
- I heard a story is told of a young girl who accepted Christ as her Saviour
 - recognised what had done as he justified her
- and applied for membership in a local church.
 - "Were you a sinner before you received the Lord Jesus into your Life?" inquired an old deacon. "Yes, sir," she replied.
 - * "Well, are you still a sinner?" he asked
 - * "To tell you the truth," she replied, "I feel I'm a greater sinner than ever."

Then he asked her, "Then what real change have you experienced?"
 - "I don't quite know how to explain it," she said, "except I used to be a sinner running after sin, but now that I am saved. I'm a sinner running from sin!"
- Sanctification about running away from the sin that so easily entangles because we love God and because we understand what Jesus has done for us on the cross
 - It's not about running away from sin to make ourselves holy, or to make ourselves good enough, or to do anything else so that we can be acceptable to God
 - * That's already been done

- It's about choosing to live differently because of what God has done for us, and out of our love for God.

(3) Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit

- Now remember that we said that Justification is the work of Jesus.
 - He was an atoning sacrifice for our sins
 - * He brought us atonement — in other words, made us to be at one with God
 - And there is nothing that we can do to add to the work of Jesus
- Now Jesus Justifies, but it is the Spirit who sanctifies.
 - It is the power of the Holy Spirit working within us that gives us the power to flee from the sin in our lives
 - * but this time we do have work to do
- We co-operate with the Spirit
 - it still isn't something we do ourselves, but we work together with the Spirit working in us.
- In Galatians Paul writes about the fruit of the Spirit being love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
 - The funny thing about fruit is that fruit grows slowly
 - * It doesn't appear miraculously on a tree one morning!
- Heard a story of a man once bought a home with a tree in the backyard. It was winter, and nothing marked this tree as different from any other tree.
 - When spring came, the tree grew leaves and tiny pink buds. "How wonderful," thought the man. "A flower tree! I will enjoy its beauty all summer." But before he had time to enjoy the flowers, the wind began to blow and soon all the petals were strewn in the yard.
 - * "What a mess," he thought. "This tree isn't any use after all."
 - The summer passed, and one day the man noticed the tree was full of green fruit the size of large nuts. He picked one and took a bite. "Yug!" he cried and threw it to the ground.
 - * "What a horrible taste! This tree is worthless. Its flowers are so fragile the wind blows them away, and its fruit is terrible and bitter. When winter comes, I'm cutting it down."
 - But the tree took no notice of the man and continued to draw water from the ground and warmth from the sun and in late autumn produced crisp red apples
- That what sanctification is like: You may not see anything happening on the outside, but the stems and branches of the plant are filled with nutrients and moisture drawn from the soil

- And as those nutrients flow through the tree they slowly bring new life, and an abundance of fruits.
 - * The Holy Spirit, if we allow him to, flows through our being and produces new life within us.
- Do you notice that two things are needed?
 - The power of the Holy Spirit flowing through us
 - And our willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us
 - * to take a risk ILLUSTRATION!
- We don't do it on our own, but the Holy Spirit can't do anything unless we give him the space to do that work.

CONCLUSION

- And so that brings us the end of a look at the second theological word.
 - Justification is the event of being found acceptable by God
 - * Sanctification is the process that begins immediately after as we begin to grow in grace and Christlikeness
 - Justification is for the ungodly and the wicked
 - * Sanctification is for those who love God
 - Justification is the work of Jesus Christ
 - * Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit
- Let me close off with a quote from John Newton, the slave trader who wrote the song Amazing Grace:
 - “I am not what I might be, I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I wish to be, I am not what I hope to be. But I thank God I am not what I once was, and I can say with the great apostle, “By the grace of God I am what I am.”
- May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen