



SANCTIFICATION

Herman Hoeksema



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All quotations from scripture are from the King James Version.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. —2 Corinthians 5:17

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. —Galatians 2:20

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. —Ephesians 2:8–10

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. —Philippians 2:12–13

FOREWORD

Contained in this small pamphlet is a speech that was given on April 6, 1961, in Oak Lawn, Illinois, by Rev. Herman Hoeksema and transcribed by Rev. G. Vanden Berg. At the time of the speech, Reverend Hoeksema was pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The speech was delivered late in his life. In September 1965 the Lord took him to glory with the church triumphant. At the point in Reverend Hoeksema's life when the speech was given, his theology was refined and fully developed. The speech is Hoeksema at his best. The speech reads with a warm love of God and the Reformed faith and has the beautiful aroma of man as nothing and God as everything.

The subject of Reverend Hoeksema's speech is sanctification. There is confusion around the topic of sanctification today, and the apostate church world uses the doctrine of sanctification to promote much false doctrine. Sanctification has simply become a synonym for doing good works by grace. Sanctification has become what the Holy Spirit enables a man to do. Jesus Christ accomplished all of the elect sinner's salvation objectively on the cross, so that the sinner might now grow in his life of holiness by the enabling of the Holy Spirit. And that work of God and man enabled by the Spirit is taught as complete salvation. Sanctification is presented as a linear path of growth along the Christian's life. The sinner becomes more holy as he grows older and does more good works. He progresses in holiness by his good works performed by grace. And at the end of his life, the sinner can look back and see that he has grown more holy. The false teacher appeals to the analogy of an acorn that is planted in the ground that grows and

becomes a mighty oak tree. So also a man has the principle or seed of sanctification, and that principle sprouts and grows into something mighty by the end of the man's life. That is the doctrine of sanctification in the church world today. This speech, then, certainly has much to say about the state of nominally Christian and Reformed theology.

Reverend Hoeksema's speech refutes and rejects those errors and more, including the idea of man having an active role in and working for sanctification. This error he rejects as synergism, which means "cooperation between God and man so that God performs one part of sanctification and we perform another part of sanctification." The speech denies the false idea that there is progress in the work of sanctification and grounds this rejection in the truth of Romans 7. And finally, this speech rejects outright the error of perfectionism, that a Christian can walk perfectly according to God's commandments in this life.

Reverend Hoeksema spends time defining and explaining key concepts, such as the order of salvation, and he emphasizes the importance of this order as being logical and not temporal. He defines justification, and he defends and teaches justification as the ground of sanctification. He positively defines sanctification as the work of the triune God, and he pulls away some of the mystery regarding the heart and the nature of man. He answers the difficult question, what is the heart? He pinpoints exactly what is sanctified by the work of the triune God.

I heartily commit this pamphlet to your reading and study. It is worthy of that. The pamphlet is full of doctrinal instruction from a God-first, decretal, theological viewpoint. The instruction is God-glorifying and God-honoring. It is edifying and instructive in a day when the truth of sanctification is being corrupted and denied. May our covenant God bless the instruction given in this pamphlet and apply it to the hearts of his people by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

— Rev. Tyler D. Ophoff
Minister of First Reformed Protestant Church
April 2024

SANCTIFICATION

Introduction

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, as your pastor announced, I was asked to speak on the subject of justification and sanctification; that is part of what is often called in Latin the *ordo salutis*—that is, the order of salvation. That order of salvation we must conceive not of being a mere temporal order. It is not exactly an order of time but an order of logic—a logical order. You will understand that, I think, if you have me mention a moment the different steps of the order of salvation. As far as I am concerned—and all do not agree with me, and that of course is perfectly all right—but as far as I read the scriptures, then we can speak of the order of salvation and the various steps of the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ as they are applied unto our hearts as follows: first, there is regeneration; second, there is the step of calling; third, there is the step of saving faith; fourth, there is the step of justification; then of sanctification; then of perseverance, or preservation; and finally of glorification. Regeneration, calling, faith, justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification.

Now you will undoubtedly immediately understand that these various steps cannot be conceived in the temporal sense of the word. It is not an order of time that we mention in these various steps but rather an order of logic. You know, I said that regeneration is the first step, the first blessing which God in Jesus Christ, our Lord, applies unto our hearts. Yet you understand that even before we can possibly

be regenerated, we must be justified. Only on the basis of justification will God give us the blessing of regeneration. And the same is true of all the other steps. I can say, for instance, regeneration already implies all the other steps of the way of salvation.

Now I was asked to speak on two of these steps of our salvation—namely, about justification and sanctification. But the more I thought about the matter and about my subject, the more I came to the conclusion that it is well-nigh impossible in one lecture, unless you prefer to sit here until tomorrow morning, to treat all that is implied in justification and sanctification. Well-nigh impossible! And, therefore, I came to the conclusion that I will speak on sanctification only, but I will bring the subject of justification in my lecture where it is possible and where it is required. And, therefore, I prefer to speak to you tonight on that subject of sanctification.

In the first place I want to call your attention to sanctification as a work of grace. In the second place I want to call your attention to sanctification as, let me say, a possible process. And, finally, I will speak on sanctification as to its final perfection in glory. So, Sanctification: first, A Work of Grace; second, A Process; and third, The Perfection of Sanctification.

A Work of Grace

I do not know whether I should introduce you to a subject that I treated last night with my adult catechism class, but I think in order to understand what is meant by sanctification, I will try for a moment to make plain to you that subject that I treated last night. We were discussing in catechism the second chapter of the book of Genesis, and in connection with the seventh verse of that second chapter I spoke on man. In that seventh verse, as you remember, we read that “God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” I

made the remark, and I put it on the blackboard to make it plain. If I had a blackboard here tonight, I could make it plainer to you too, but I will try to do it verbally. I made the remark in connection with that seventh verse of Genesis 2 that man is not two but one. Man is one being, not two. It is not so that according to that seventh verse of Genesis 2, God first made a sort of clay image and then breathed a soul into that clay image. That certainly is not the meaning. Man is a physical, a psychical, and a spiritual being in his whole nature. Physical he is in the outward sense of the word. I drew a large circle on the blackboard, and I said, "That is the outward man." In that physical substance of the body of man, there are five senses, as you know. The sense of sight, the sense of hearing, the senses of touch and taste and smell. Through these senses man is connected with the earthly world. Through these senses he can see and hear and taste and touch and smell the outside earthly world. Then I drew another circle, and I made the remark that that second circle is the psychical part or, if you wish, the soul part of the body. And in that soul part of the body, there are the nerves, the nervous system that leads from the eyes, the ears, the taste and touch and smell to the person. And then I made a third circle and said, "This is the psychical part of the soul." The soul which God breathed into the nostrils of Adam in his creation is part of man, of the whole man, of his nature, of his body, of his senses, of his mind, his will, his feeling—all these nerves reach finally the spirit of man. I take the spirit of man as the very center of the human being, and in that spirit of man is the person, the I, the ego. Now listen! That is man from a purely natural point of view. Man, as God created him out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

But maybe, as one did in my catechism class last night, now you ask the question: "Where then is the heart of man?" And I answered, "That is an entirely new and different viewpoint of that same man—namely, the spiritual viewpoint of man." The heart is not a separate

part of the human being, but the heart is that in man according to which he is related to God and either loves God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength or he hates God. That first of all.

Now listen! This subject of sanctification is not a very easy subject, as you probably think. It is not! It is a very difficult subject, and I will try to make it as plain as I can. Sanctification does not belong as such to the purely natural man. The idea of sanctification belongs in principle to the heart of man—the heart! Not to the person, not to the spirit, not to the soul side of the spirit, not to the body, but sanctification belongs to the heart of man. The heart! I will come back to that, but before I do so I would like to make a definition of sanctification and I will say this: *Sanctification is that work of the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord through the Holy Spirit whereby he delivers the regenerated and justified sinner from the power and dominion of sin and causes him to walk in all good works.*

I repeat. I say: Sanctification is that work of God's grace in Christ Jesus through his Spirit—and I might add also through the word—whereby he delivers the justified and regenerated sinner from the dominion and power of sin and causes him to walk in all good works. That is my definition.

Now you understand, of course, that I already mentioned in that definition the work of justification, and although I am not going to speak particularly on justification, I will nevertheless for a moment compare justification and sanctification. And then I would say justification is that work of God in and through Christ Jesus whereby we are delivered from the guilt of sin. Justification is, therefore, a juridical, a legal, act of God. An act of God whereby the sinner stands righteous before God. Sanctification is, as I said, that act of God whereby the sinner is delivered not from the guilt of sin—that is justification—but delivered from the power and the dominion of sin. That is the difference between justification and sanctification.

Moreover, I may say in a way that justification is the act of God

in one moment. Justification, including the forgiveness of sins and the adoption unto the children of God, is not a process, but it takes place in one moment. And in one moment that justification as it is applied, I say, to the heart of the believing sinner—that act of God that is called justification does not continue but is complete and finished immediately. Either a man is justified at once or he lies in sin. Sanctification, however, as I hope to speak on presently, sanctification is a spiritual, ethical—ah, big terms, but I do not know if I can express that any other way. I mean sanctification is an act of God that deals with not the guilt of sin but with the defilement and corruption of sin in the unrighteous. Justification delivers us immediately from the guilt of sin. Sanctification is the act of God whereby we are delivered from the corruption and the defilement of sin. That is the difference.

Hence, I may say too that justification is the ground of sanctification. Only on the basis of perfect righteousness, only on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Christ can the sinner possibly be delivered from the defilement of sin. We have no right to be delivered from sin. No right! We are not only sinners, but we are also legally sinners. We are sinners, beloved, in the juridical sense of the word. Oh, that is possibly strong language, but to make it plain to you I will use that strong language. We may not serve God. The sentence upon us is death. God pronounced that sentence upon us. And death means, beloved, not that we are nothing but that that whole man as I tried to picture to you a while ago, that whole man in body and senses, with soul and spirit and person, that whole man lies in death according to the sentence of God: “The day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). And that death also implies spiritual death; and spiritual death means that we have no right to live in God’s fellowship, that we have no right to serve God. Therefore, justification is the ground of sanctification.

You understand, of course, and I do not have to mention that,

but I will just a moment. You understand, of course, that justification is accomplished in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ died. The Son of God in our flesh died the death of which the elect are worthy to suffer. And when Christ died on the cross and said, “It is finished,” he meant that all his people had become legally justified. And God answered that “It is finished” of Christ on the cross by Christ’s resurrection. The death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, are the ground of our justification, the ground of the great blessing, the ground of the fundamental grace that we may again serve God and that we may again have fellowship with him. That is the relationship between justification and sanctification.

And now I will turn once more to that one subject. I said that sanctification is that work of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord, through his Spirit and word whereby he delivers the justified and regenerated sinner from the defilement of sin and gives him the power to walk in all good works. That is scripture. That is in Ephesians 4, to which I will return some time again, but it is also in Ephesians 2:8–9, the well-known words, beloved, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” And then verse 10: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” The privilege of doing good works has been merited by our Lord Jesus Christ and which God—notice there is nothing of man in here at all—“unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” All that is the privilege of the people of God, merited by our Lord Jesus Christ, and for which the children of God are prepared by God that they may walk in the good works that he has before ordained. Now let me return a moment.

What is the deepest soil of sanctification? It is, beloved, God himself. God is *holy*! And because God is holy, he wants to make his people holy. That God is holy means not only that he is pure. Of course! But it means, beloved, that attribute of God according to

which he loves himself. God only could do that, and God only may do that. God loves himself. God is consecrated to himself. He cannot be consecrated to any other being because he is *God!* Now then, when God makes his people holy on the basis of the justifying grace of Jesus Christ, our Lord, then they are not consecrated to themselves but they are consecrated to God. They do not love themselves, but they love God. Then they are devoted not to the service of themselves but to the service of God. That is the result of sanctification.

Now I said that sanctification is the work of God's grace; and when I say that, beloved, you must take that in the literal and absolute sense of the word. We do not and we cannot sanctify ourselves. I know, as your pastor read tonight, we are admonished to put off the old man and his wicked works and to put on the new man created in Christ Jesus. That is true. But nevertheless, that is the fruit of the work of God whereby he sanctifies his people. We must have nothing of what is called *synergism*—big word—which means cooperation between God and man, so that God performs one part of sanctification and we perform another part of sanctification. Oh, no! God only performs the work of sanctification in Christ Jesus. Nor must we have anything of Pelagianism. *Pelagianism* means, beloved, oh, to be sure God works the work of sanctification only. No question about that. Pelagius said that too. God works the work of sanctification by grace. It's all grace. Of course! Pelagius said that too! Do not think that you meet with any Reformed man because he says that all the work of salvation is the work of God's grace. Oh, no, no, no, no! But Pelagianism says, beloved, that God will work that work of sanctification in the heart of anyone, provided that one wills God to so work! That is Pelagianism. No question about it. We must be willing to be sanctified, and we must be willing to walk in all good works—willing—and then the Spirit of Christ will work in us. Nevertheless, the will of man is first. That is contrary to all scripture, and it is certainly contrary to all our Reformed confessions.

Just think of Philippians 2:12–13: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” That is scripture throughout. And that is *Reformed!* I will take no time, I think, but when you come home you better read article 24 of our Netherland Confession, and you will find that in that Belgic and Netherland Confession all the work of sanctification—this article speaks of sanctification—is entirely the work of God from beginning to end. The same is true, of course, of the Canons of Dordrecht, which was composed in opposition to the Arminians who also wanted the will of man to be the basis of the work of the will of God. We must have nothing of it.

So then that is sanctification. The work of God through our Lord Jesus Christ and his Spirit and word whereby he delivers us from the defilement and corruption of sin, so that we are enabled to walk in all good works. All of grace. Nothing of us except for the fruit of sanctification.

A Process

And now we come to a very difficult question—a question for the purpose of which I tried to draw before your imagination the being of man in his body and his soul and spirit and his person. That question that must be answered is this: Is there progress in the work of sanctification? And by talking about the progress of that work of sanctification, I do not mean is there progress in our walk of sanctification, but I mean is there progress of sanctification in man’s nature? in his body? in his soul? Is there progress? May we say, beloved, that the work of sanctification means that the soul, mind, will, nature, and body of the Christian become more holy as we go on? My answer—no, not my answer but the answer of scripture—is no. And that is also the answer of our Reformed confessions.

If you want to read scripture in this respect, you must especially

read the last part of Romans 7, where the apostle speaks of himself and of himself only. “The commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death” (v. 10). And then, “Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin...” (v. 13). Mind you, the apostle Paul speaks not of sin in general but of sin in his own person. “Sin...working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (v. 13). That is not all. “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin” (v. 14). That is Paul. That is not Paul before his conversion. Oh, no, as is very evident from what follows. Listen! “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not” (v. 15). Notice the same ego, the same *I*, the *I*, the person, the ego of the apostle is speaking here. And he says, “If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (vv. 16–17).

Do you agree with that? I mean do you personally agree with that? Do you not only intellectually understand it, but is that your personal experience? It should be.

Listen! “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh)”—and the flesh is not only the body but also the entire nature of man. “I know that in me [the apostle]...dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not” (vv. 18–19). I... I... Same person. Same person of the apostle Paul. Not two persons. Same person. “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (vv. 19–22). And that inward man, beloved, is the heart, the heart of man. The heart of the Christian is the regenerated heart. Notice, “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward

man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (vv. 21–23). That is Paul. That is Paul personally, and that is Paul after his conversion. No question about it because at the conclusion he says, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (v. 24). And the answer is, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (v. 25).

That means, beloved, not that there are two persons in the Christian. One person! I sin, and I fight against sin. I... Same I... Same person! I have delight in the law of God, and I do not that which I would. Same person! And that means, beloved, according to the same chapter that your pastor read a moment ago, Ephesians 4, that there is in the Christian unto the day of his death the old man; and that old man in his body and in his soul is corrupt. That is also true of you and me. The old man is the man who hates God, and that old man is right here. The old man is the man who loves sin, loves the world, loves corruption, hates the law of God, and says, “I will not.” That is the old man in you and in me. But that old man is not rooted in the heart. The heart of the Christian is regenerated, and from the heart of that regenerated Christian there are the motions of grace working in his soul and in his body, fighting against the old man that is still in our members. And that, therefore, beloved, is the proper conception of the Christian in this world.

Do you not know?

The Heidelberg Catechism asks the question—I think it is question 114—“But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?” And the answer is: “No; but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.” That is the Christian.

The Perfection of Sanctification

And now I close with one more remark. And that is the remark concerning what is called perfectionism. *Perfectionism*, beloved, means the system that claims that the Christian in the present life can walk perfectly according to the commandments of God. He may not do it always, but he can. He can keep the commandments of God, and those who teach perfectionism have several grounds for that idea.

First, they say that scripture commands the people of God to be holy in this life, and that, of course, is true. “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). No question about that. But we answer that the possibility, no, the command of God to be holy does not mean that that holiness can possibly be reached without sin in this life.

Then, second, they point to the fact that the church is called holy, and that is also true. Scripture calls the church holy, but we answer on the basis of all scripture that that holiness is in principle the holiness of Christ and is in principle only in the church. Only in principle is the church holy, not in actual fact.

Then they quote texts such as that text in 1 John where it says that the child of God does not sin. I think it is 1 John 3:9: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” But then I would answer the perfectionist with another text, beloved. In the same epistle of John, we read, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1:8). So if you take these two passages from the epistle of John together, you must come to the conclusion that, of course, the regenerated man as such, because the seed of regeneration is in him, cannot sin. Nevertheless, that regenerated man in his old nature in the old world certainly still not only can sin, but he also does sin, so that the statement of 1 John 1:8 remains: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

They also point to the sinless lives of some of the saints, like Enoch and Noah and others. But, beloved, in all the witnesses that are mentioned in Hebrews 11, there is not one that did not commit sin. All the saints of the old dispensation and the saints of the new dispensation are holy in principle but are sinful in their old nature nevertheless and in the midst of the present world. The Reformed people have never agreed to that theory of perfectionism. They had a much deeper insight not only in the scriptures but also in the nature of the Christian. Hence, they said, “No, we must put off the old man and put on the new man, to be sure, but it is never perfectly accomplished in this life. It must wait till the day of glory.”

And, therefore, I conclude by saying to all of you: Fight! Fight the good fight even unto death that no one take your crown.

I thank you!

Appendix 1

BELGIC CONFESSION

Article 24: Man's Sanctification and Good Works

We believe that this true faith being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God, and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. Therefore it is so far from being true, that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man: for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith, which is called in Scripture, a faith that worketh by love, which excites man to the practice of those works, which God has commanded in his Word. Which works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by his grace: howbeit they are of no account towards our justification. For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works; otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good.

Therefore we do good works, but not to merit by them, (for what can they merit?) nay, we are beholden to God for the good works we do, and not he to us, since it is he that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Let us therefore attend to what is written:

when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do. In the meantime, we do not deny that God rewards our good works, but it is through his grace that he crowns his gifts. Moreover, though we do good works, we do not found our salvation upon them; for we do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable; and although we could perform such works, still the remembrance of one sin is sufficient to make God reject them. Thus then we would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences continually vexed, if they relied not on the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior.*

* Belgic Confession 24, in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and added Chorale Section*, reprinted and revised edition of the 1912 United Presbyterian *Psalter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1927; rev. ed. 1995), 46.

Appendix 2

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

Lord's Day 44

Q. 113. What doth the tenth commandment require of us?

A. That even the smallest inclination or thought, contrary to any of God's commandments, never rise in our hearts; but that at all times we hate all sin with our whole heart, and delight in all righteousness.

Q. 114. But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?

A. No: but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.

Q. 115. Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

A. First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in

seeking the remission of sin, and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavor, and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us, in a life to come.*

* Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24, in *The Psalter*, 24.

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