

Session 9

Chapter 7 Introduction to Sanctification



The Greco-Roman culture in which the Christian faith emerged was very religious. There were “many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’” (1 Cor. 8:5), such as Dionysius, Mithras and Cybele, that were vying for people’s allegiance. Known as mysterious religions, many in the Roman Empire were attracted to them, some of which were known for peculiar practices like intoxication with wine and eating raw meat to experience God.

I. Paul’s Concern for the Church

In this type of cultural milieu, one important question for apostle Paul was the manner in which the new faith was to be distinguished from these mysterious religions of Rome.

While pointing out doctrinal differences was very crucial, the first thing most people would have noticed was the differences in how they lived.

A. Paul’s true intention when he wrote to the Corinthian Church

When the apostle was informed that some members of the Corinthian Church became intoxicated at the Lord’s Supper,¹ instead of addressing the issue of whether or not it was okay to drink, he said, “Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in?” (1 Cor. 12:22^a).

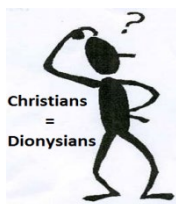
What was Paul so upset about?

That someone got drunk? Or that this took place at church?

1. In the context of conservative Christian culture, the sin of drunkenness is likely to be denounced first.
2. However, it appears that that was not Paul’s immediate concern, for he said, in effect, “If you must get drunk, do it at home.” To him, getting drunk at church was tantamount to despising it (1 Cor. 12:22). Why would the apostle say that?



B. Paul’s immediate concern



Corinth was the center of Dionysian worship as late as the second century B.C. Believing that the god was in the wine, “sheer physical intoxication from the drinking wine was the essence of Dionysian religion.”² This typically led to immoral activities.

¹ “One remains hungry, another gets drunk” (1 Cor. 11:21).

² *Pagan Regeneration: Chapter III Dionysian Excesses*, accessed from the Web.

1. In light of that, Paul was likely perturbed by the prospect of outsiders who couldn't distinguish a Christian fellowship denoted by drunkenness from the Dionysian worship whose trademark was public intoxication.
2. When Ephesians 5:18 is read in that light, Paul's concern over distinguishing the Christian faith from Dionysian worship is evident.

It is as if he were saying, "Do not get drunk on wine [like the Dionysians], which leads to debauchery. Instead, [as Christians,] be filled with the Spirit."

3. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul left no doubt about his concern: "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16).

II. Relationship between Paul's Concern and Sanctification

What does sanctification have to do with maintaining the Christian distinction?

A. The idea of separation

1. The word "sanctification" derives from the Greek word *hagiasmos* (ἁγιασμός), which also means "holiness" in English.
2. The primary concept behind sanctification is "separation," but separation from what?

B. How God separates us

There are at least three ways in which God, through divine choosing, separates the believers (i.e., His remnant), first for Himself, and then from the world and sin.

1. In the OT, God chose the family of Seth, Noah and Abraham from the ungodly and idolatrous world (i.e., families) for His divine purposes.
2. He separated the nation of Israel from Egypt and the surrounding nations.
3. In the NT, Jesus chose for himself twelve disciples and sanctified them for their future ministries.

- a. Thus, in his prayer to the Father, Jesus petitioned:

"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (Jn. 17:15-20).

- b. Furthermore, the very meaning of the word “church” (*ekklesia*) is “called out” or “separated,” and to each believer, the same call still remains.

Discussion¹: What are some unhealthy habits, thoughts and/or behaviors that you need to “separate yourself from” in order to be more productive and pleasing to the Lord?

C. Separation from being *of* the world, but not the world itself

Paul was in shock to hear that someone attending the Corinthian Church was having sexual relations with his father’s wife (likely his stepmother).

Extra slide: “The Singapore Controversy”: Introducing Jesus Culture to pop-culture (Sung Ho). Is this “of the world” or “in the world?” Can you tell her apart from others? I am not saying that Christians shouldn’t be an artist but I do wonder whether there some limits to what we can do in the name of pop-culture.

1. The apostle lamented, “A kind that does not occur even among pagans?” (1 Cor. 5:1). He was further miffed that no disciplinary measure was taken against this person.

In a later epistle to Timothy, Paul, in addressing the problem of some Christian men not providing for his immediate family, called out the irresponsible men as being “worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8).

- a. In both cases, Paul’s point of reference was the unbelieving world.
- b. This shows that he was quite conscious about how the world might perceive the new faith. That is to say, Paul was clearly sensitive about the importance of Christian conduct exceeding the sinful conducts of the people of the world.
- c. What is not surprising is Paul’s instruction to excommunicate this wayward member from the church (1 Cor. 5:5, 13); the clarification that followed shows his concern that he is not misunderstood.

2. Separation from what? In 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, Paul says:

“I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.

¹¹ But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.”

- a. Does Paul mean avoiding any contact with unbelievers and sinners?

Evidently, Paul was concerned that the Corinthian believers might construe his

disciplinary measure to mean avoiding any contact with unbelievers and sinners in Corinth, a city infamous for immorality due in large part to its 1,000 temples prostitutes.

(1) However, this is precisely what Paul didn't want; thus, he said euphemistically, "If that were the case, all Christians would have to leave the world."

(2) Clearly, Christians are not to separate themselves from the world; instead, they are to stay in the world, or as Paul put it, "Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him" (7:20).

b. Nevertheless, Christians are to separate themselves from how the people of this world, described by Paul as immoral, greedy, deceitful and idolatrous, live.

(1) So, when Paul quoted Isaiah 52:11—"Therefore come out from them and be separate"—in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 6:17^a), he was saying that they should live differently from how other Corinthians live.

(2) In the epistle to the Romans, Paul framed the same concern like this: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world" (Rom. 12:2^a).

c. Now, Now, consider the following example that comes from Singapore involving the wife of a megachurch pastor named Sun Ho. She is a singer and dancer with some following in Asia who attempted to break into the American music scene. It was done under the rubric of introducing "Jesus culture" to pop-culture.

(1) But, looking at the music video featuring her and other scantily dressed women dancing and gyrating, one wonders whether this "of the world" or "in the world" (trying to glorify God).

(2) Can you tell her apart from others?

(3) I am not saying that Christians shouldn't be an artist but I do wonder whether there are some limits as to what we can do in the name of pop-culture? A stripper who undressed before lusty men to glorify God immediately comes to mind.

III. Paul's Stunning Appraisal of the Corinthians

This, of course, was easier said than done for many people who attended the Corinthian Church. Why?

A. One messed up congregation

1. Paul, after making a list of those who will not inherit the kingdom

of God, including the sexually immoral, adulterers and thieves, said, “And this is what some of you were.”

2. Apparently, having come out of shady background, many of the Corinthian believers hadn’t completely broken away from it.

After describing them as “worldly” (1 Cor. 3:3), Paul noted the following misdeeds rampant among them:

Division (1:11-2), lawsuit (6:1-8), immorality (7:1), idolatry (10:20-2), intoxication (11:21), fracturing of the body of Christ (12:12-20), absence of love (13:1-13) and abusing of spiritual gifts (14:1-39).



B. Paul’s appraisal of this messed up group

Even so, it is what Paul said about this messed up Corinthian congregation that “complicates” the matter of sanctification.

1. In 1 Corinthians 6, after saying, “This is what some of you were” (i.e., immoral sinners) Paul declared, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11).
2. How could apostle Paul see these people as already sanctified when their actual lives reflected more of the ways of the world than the way of Christ?

C. The two-edged sword of sanctification

1. This dilemma, then, introduces the concept of the position of believers before the Lord (i.e., positional sanctification) in contrast to their present state (progressive sanctification).
2. The application of both concepts to the life of believers is critical toward their transformation to the likeness of Christ (covered in the next chapter).

IV. The Need for Sanctification

A. The primary reason for separation: it hinges on the very nature of God Himself.

1. The Triune Godhead is holy and devoid of any sins.
 - a. God told Moses to take off his sandals because the place where he was standing was holy ground (Ex. 3:4-5); apostle John added, “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5).
 - b. Jesus proclaimed, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me

will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12).

c. Of course, the Spirit of God is holy.

2. Thus, apostle Peter says, “But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-6).

B. Second reason for separation: without it the world won’t be convinced.

1. Paul states that the believers are like “a letter from Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God . . . known and read by everybody” (2 Cor. 3:3, 2).
 - a. However, unless the believer displays a distinctive lifestyle befitting Christ, the world will not be impressed with his message. Thus, the Hebrews writer says, “Make every effort . . . to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14^b).
 - b. And without holiness (e.g., having the right heart, avoid sinning, doing good deeds, etc.), the believers are unable to “shine before men” (Matt. 5:16^a) as the salt and light of the world (5:13-14).
 - c. The purpose of the light is so that “they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (5:16^b); however, that will not take place unless the world sees holiness in the believers.
2. Ultimately, its saddest outcome is hindering the gospel ministry.



In Genesis 12:3, God, through Abraham, commissioned the nation of Israel to be the channel of God’s blessings to the world, saying, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” This is a prototype for the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20).

- a. Prophet Isaiah, regarding the purpose of Israel in the world, says, “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Is. 60:3).
- b. However, the light of Israel was very dim because, instead of being different from the Canaanite nations, they lived just like them.
- c. Consequently, Israel became very ineffectiveness in being the channel of God’s blessings to the nations. To that end, Prophet Jeremiah says,

“If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray, and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, ‘As surely as the LORD lives,’ then the nations will invoke blessings by him and in him they will boast” (Jer. 4:1^a-2).

(1) This is to say, the Canaanite nations were not drawn to the God of Israel because the way the Israelites lived (even whom they worshiped)

was indistinguishable from how they lived and whom they worshiped.

(2) In other words, the Canaanites did not see the Lord in Israel because of the absence of holiness in their midst.

3. Ultimately, unsanctified believers are much like the salt that has lost its saltiness, unable to be used for anything. Thus, Jesus says:

“If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”

Discussion²: Salt is used (among other things) to season (to boost the flavor), to preserve (to keep the meat from going bad) and to melt ice on the road. Considering that how is your saltiness? Does your life edify others; do you keep sin (e.g., gossip) from spreading; are you an encouragement to others?

C. Third reason for separation: it benefits those who are being sanctified.

Sanctification is absolutely needed to separate the believers, particularly recent converts, from unhealthy and sinful lifestyles that may still affect them.

1. Some believers periodically return to their former lifestyle much like “a dog returning to its vomit,” or “a sow that is washed going back to her wallowing in the mud” (2 Pet. 2:22).
2. Though they confess Christ with their lips, their allegiance is torn between the world and Christ. No other person describes this inner struggle better than Paul who wrote:

“For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it” (Rom. 7:19-20).



3. Here, it is unlikely that Paul was referring to, as some insist, his post-conversion days.

Consider these three reasons:

- a. First, the thought flow of Romans is quite linear:
Chapter 3—All have sinned; 4—Justification by faith; 5—Subsequent peace with God; 6—Now living for God; 7—Back to pre-conversion days?

(1) No, it is more likely that in Chapters 7 and 8, Paul delves into the struggles involved in the Christian life.

(2) Whoever denies that true believers can struggle with sins is, in effect, countering what apostle John said in 1 John 1:8, 10 (ESV):

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . .

¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

b. Second, Paul uses present tense throughout Romans 7.

c. Third, Paul’s description of his legalistic righteousness as being “faultless” (Phil. 3:6) during his pre-conversion days does not correspond to his intense inner turmoil described in Romans 7.

4. Thus, through sanctification, the believers must trust that Jesus will bring forth the victory over their sinful nature, as Paul confidently asserted,

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6; discussed later).

D. What sanctification is not

1. Sanctification is not about how moral and ethical we are becoming as a result of separating ourselves from the ways of the world, but rather, how we are conforming to the likeness of Christ.



Paul states:

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:5-8).

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

2. Ultimately, sanctification is needed because it is through that process we learn to embody the character of Christ, his humility, love, kindness patience, selflessness, etc.

In the next chapter, the duality of our standing and state before the Lord is addressed.

Homework 9

Read over the material covered in the last class and the additional Bible reading (if any). If you have any questions, please note them here and ask me later.

1. What is so shocking about Paul's lofty appraisal of the spirituality of the Corinthians who were not known for holiness? What does that say about the value of positional sanctification?
2. Define sanctification based on the Greek word *hagiasmos*.
3. Why is sanctification needed in our lives?