

III. GOD'S SANCTIFICATION OF ALL JUSTIFIED HUMAN BEINGS THROUGH CHRIST

In this section (6:1-8:39) Paul deals with sanctification. But what is meant by "sanctification"?

Sometimes in Scripture the idea of sanctification is purely objective or positional, as when persons or things are consecrated, set apart, or declared holy. In a very real sense, all justified persons are "saints" or "holy ones," and when they are said to have been sanctified, it means that in God's sight, positionally, in view of what God is doing in their lives, they are consecrated, set apart to God.

Other times in Scripture the idea of sanctification bears directly on the idea of deliverance from sin through the gospel. However, instead of dealing with deliverance from the guilt and penalty of transgression as in justification, sanctification in this subjective, experiential sense deals with deliverance from the power and presence of innate corruption or depravity.

It is this subjective, experiential aspect of sanctification that Paul appears to be dealing with in this third major section -- deliverance from innate corruption.

In this section, 6:1-8:39, Paul provides us with the great key to sanctification -- union with Christ -- and develops three steps in the direction of deliverance from innate corruption, all of which depend on union with Christ.

Union with Christ is the key to our real death to innate sin; union with Christ is the key to our new relationship to the Law; and union with Christ is the key to life to innate righteousness.

But what is meant by "union with Christ"? What does it mean to be united or joined to Christ?

Does it mean to become part of Him, to be absorbed into Him, to become one with Him to such an extent that we no longer have any thoughts of our own, or any feelings of our own, or any desires of our own, or any will of our own? Does union with Christ mean being swallowed up into His being, His nature, His essence, to such an extent that we can say that we are becoming divine?

Of course, all these are mystical ideas, and Paul presents none of them in connection with his teaching concerning union with Christ.

In Paul's teaching, union with Christ simply means "our saving relationship to Christ by faith." This union with Christ is brought about by the Holy Spirit, who unites us through faith to Jesus Christ and to the benefits of His atoning work. When Paul uses the expression "in Christ," he means that one is in saving relationship to Christ.

This union is stressed in 6:3-5. Paul writes: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."