

Lesson 15: Sanctification

“All this then, is the office and work of the Holy Spirit, to begin and daily to increase holiness on earth through these two means, the Christian church and the forgiveness of sins. Then, when we pass from this life, he will instantly perfect our holiness and will eternally preserve us in it by means of the last two parts of this article.”

—Dr. Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*: The Third Article of the Creed

Thesis:
Sanctification is the gracious work of the Holy Spirit whereby He day by day renews the believer more and more after the image of God (Sverdrup 229).

Key question:
How does the Holy Spirit sanctify us?

Catechism:
Sverdrup's Questions 228-236

Accompanying Bible Story:
John 15:1-11 – The Vine and the Branches

My questions:

Spring! The sap in the trees starts to flow again now. The earth's rich nutrients are carried to the budding leaves. The leaves sprout out, and the new green fills the world in front of us. It's called "spring green," this first green that contrasts the grays and browns of winter.

Some of you may help to plant a garden. We eat the roots of plants like carrots and potatoes. We eat the leaves of plants like lettuce and spinach and kale. Some of our garden plants will produce vines from which we will harvest fruit: tomatoes and squash and pumpkin.

Some of you may have fruit trees or an orchard where you will soon see flowers bloom. Bees and wind will pollinate the flowers. Fruit will start to grow. Over the summer, you might watch as the fruit, fed by the tree's sap, grows to edible size.

One of the necessary though often hard things to do as a gardener is to prune the fruit trees or vegetable vines. Pruning means cutting off part of the plant: branches that won't produce fruit, extra leafy ends that rob the fruit of the needed sap. On a tomato vine, the suckers, or branches that grow out of the "V" where other branches are attached to the stem, need be pinched off. Suckers don't produce good tomatoes. Instead, they unnecessarily use up the nutrients the tomatoes need.

Jesus must have been familiar with good gardening techniques. The Bible doesn't tell us whether or not his family had a garden while He was growing up, but they might have. What was plentiful in Israel during the years Jesus walked the earth were grape vines. It would not be surprising if Jesus had learned how to prune grape vines so they would produce a good crop of grapes. If He did not learn, at least He would have watched as others did the pruning.

Because the practice was so common, Jesus used the grape growing process as a metaphor to help us understand God's relationship with us. He called Himself the trunk of the grape vine. He called us the branches. He talked about our need to receive our life from Him just as the branches get their life from the trunk. He talked about pruning the branches to produce more fruit just as the Father works to shape our lives so we are fruitful in His kingdom.

We call this work by God, especially by the Holy Spirit, to renew us after His image, "sanctification."

* Read the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed out loud.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church, The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body; And the Life everlasting. Amen.

* Look at the Luther quote from the *Large Catechism* at the beginning of this lesson. What two things does the Holy Spirit use to increase holiness or sanctify us?

When will we be perfectly holy?

* Use the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed. What are the last two parts of this article the Holy Spirit will use to keep us for eternity?

* Look at the meaning to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed in your Lutheran *Small Catechism*. Copy the part of the meaning that explains the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

* Read John 1:8, 9. What does Jesus, the true Light, do?

* Read John 15:5. What metaphor does Jesus use to refer to those in whom He lives?

* Read John 15:3. What is already true about us if we are branches?

How were we made pure?

* Read John 15:2. What does the vinedresser do to make the branches produce more fruit?

What is Jesus saying about us with this metaphor?

* Read Philippians 2:12-16. Who is at work in us?

Why is He at work?

What attitude does God create in us about Him?

What is the result of God's work in our lives?

How is the world described?

What relationship does God want us to have with the world?

To what should we hold tight?

What did I learn in this lesson (three or four sentences)?