

## SANCTIFICATION IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER

---

- “Thus far in this study of the application of redemption, we have considered those benefits purchased by the work of Christ that the Spirit applies immediately to believers at the inception of the Christian life. At regeneration, the sinner is made alive, granted repentance and faith, united to Christ, declared righteous on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ, and adopted into the family of God.”<sup>1</sup>
- Everything that we have considered has been *immediately* imputed or given to us on our account.
- We do not work for anything...so far our only response to what has happened is that we have confessed and believed the message.
  - **Ephesians 1:13** “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise...”
  - **1 Thessalonians 2:13** “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”
  - Up to this point, our only response has been to listen to the message, believe that it was from the Lord, and then respond to the message.
- We have been discussing that we will have a different life, a different outlook on life, and a different motivation for our living, *but we have not discussed how that is done or what that looks like in real time.*
- It is of the utmost importance for us to remember what has been done for us in the past, what was done for us when we were born again (regenerated), and what we are responsible for in our walk with the Lord.
- “Sanctification is *not* the first step in the application of redemption; *it presupposes other steps such as effectual calling, regeneration, justification, and adoption.* All of these bear intimately upon sanctification.”<sup>2</sup>
- In other words, one cannot begin or be in the process of sanctification *until they have had everything else accomplished on their behalf.*
- Why can’t the sanctification process begin until someone is born again?
  - Sanctification is specifically the *work* of the Holy Spirit indwelling in the believer and directing them to a life of holiness.
  - This is very important to understand at the beginning of this study.
  - There is no sanctification without the Holy Spirit and there is no Holy Spirit with being born again.
  - We must know that we both work *and* rely on the power to work from the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur and Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine*, 631–632.

<sup>2</sup> John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 141.

- This means that every Christian, from the moment they are born again, begins the sanctification progress.
- There are no Christians who are alive who are not in the middle of being sanctified.
  - To be sure, each of us are in different places regarding our sanctification and the Lord is working in different ways to accomplish our sanctification; but we are all in the middle of it.
- **2 Thessalonians 2:13** “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.”
- “Salvation began with God’s loving choice in eternity past and will continue until glorification in the future.”<sup>3</sup>
- Just like salvation, there are three aspects to our sanctification...past, present, and future.

### **A Brief Historical Look at Sanctification**

---

- Before we look at the three aspects of our sanctification, there is a huge reason why so many people either don’t understand this process or think wrongly about it.
- “The writings of the early Church Fathers contain very little respecting the doctrine of sanctification. A strain of moralism is quite apparent in that man was taught to depend for salvation on faith and good works. Sins committed before baptism were washed away in baptism, but for those after baptism man must provide by penance and good works. He must lead a life of virtue and thus merit the approval of the Lord.”<sup>4</sup>
- In fact, it was Augustine’s writings from the 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries which caused the most confusion regarding the doctrine of sanctification.
- “He did not clearly distinguish between justification and sanctification...Since he believed in the total corruption of human nature by the fall [total depravity], he thought of sanctification as a new supernatural impartation of divine life, a new infused energy, operating exclusively within the confines of the Church and through the sacraments. While he did not lose sight of the importance of personal love to Christ as a constituent element in sanctification, he manifested a tendency to take a metaphysical view of the grace of God in sanctification, —to regard it as a deposit of God in man.”<sup>5</sup>
- In other words, Augustine believed that man’s good works had merit before God as he worked more and more he was made more and righteous. Augustine was confusing justification and sanctification...saying that “being made righteous requires an inner transformation that occurs over time.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 286.

<sup>4</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 529.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/did-augustine-get-justification-wrong#:~:text=In%20that%20sense%20scripture%20says,fully%20remade%20in%20Christ's%20image?>

- If you remember, justification (being made righteous) was an *instantaneous act* which occurred without anything from us. The process that Augustine spoke of was what we find in the Bible to be called sanctification.
  - Luther would say that the RCC started around 600 AD but was built on the seedbed of many church leaders throughout the first 600 years of Christianity...including Augustine.
- **Why is this important today?** It was the dominant thought from about 500 AD until the time of the Reformation in 1517.
- For over 1000 years the Roman Catholic Church taught that one was justified by the work of Christ and by their own work and from the grace that is imparted to them through the sacraments.
- At the Council of Trent (1545-1563) the Roman Catholic Church recognized exactly 7 sacraments to counter the Protestant Reformation.
- A sacrament is “a visible sign of an invisible grace.” In other words, it is not just a symbol of God’s favor but a physical instrument *that actually causes* the grace that it is used to signify.
- This is called the *adding up model*.<sup>7</sup>
- Sacraments of Initiation
- These rites laid the foundation of the Christian life.
- **Baptism:** The first sacrament received, believed to wash away original sin and incorporate the individual into the Church.
- **Confirmation:** A rite where the baptized were "strengthened" by the Holy Spirit to witness for Christ.
- **The Eucharist:** Considered the "sacrament of sacraments," where the bread and wine were believed to undergo transubstantiation into the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ during the Mass.
- Sacraments of Healing
- These were intended for spiritual and physical restoration.
- **Penance (Confession):** The process of confessing sins to a priest to receive absolution and perform acts of "satisfaction".
- **Extreme Unction (Anointing of the Sick):** Administered to those in danger of death (the "last rites") to provide spiritual strength and final pardon for sins.
- Sacraments of Service (Vocation)
- These focused on the mission and salvation of others.

---

<sup>7</sup> I made that up...one adds up the grace they get and see where they stand when they die. The following list was taken from several sources.

- **Holy Orders:** The ordination of men into the priesthood, transferring spiritual power and an "indelible mark" on the soul.
- **Matrimony:** The sacred binding of a man and woman in marriage, which the Church viewed as a permanent, indissoluble covenant.
- Once you die, there are certainly some other ideas to take into consideration, but if you are in a "state of grace" and "imperfectly purified" you head to purgatory. You have not become perfectly holy yet but you are a friend of God.
- "But before we can be taken into heaven, we have to be cleansed not only of all sins but of all sin's "rust and stain" (St. Catherine of Genoa's phrase), all traces of self-centeredness. By God's grace at the moment of our death we may be in a state of grace. Yet who of us can imagine himself being perfect at the moment of our death? Able to adore and love God perfectly, able to love those around us perfectly? Some persons of faith go directly to heaven. The Church tells us the martyrs are completely cleansed for heaven by their self-sacrifice. Even more, the Church allows the possibility that the experience of dying may be for some a totally purifying experience. But surely most of us at our death require purification for being received into heaven. That is the purpose of purgatory."<sup>8</sup>
- This is heresy and not the doctrine of justification nor of sanctification which is taught throughout the pages of Scripture.
- It really was not until the Reformation that there was clear writing to distinguish between the two.
- **What does the current Roman Catholic Church believe and teach?**
- **Initial Justification is a Gift:** The Church still teaches that initial justification is an entirely unmerited gift of God's grace through baptism. Neither faith nor works preceding this can merit it.
- **Rejection of "Faith Alone":** It still officially rejects faith alone is sufficient to be "totally" justified.
- **Justification as an Interior Change:** ...justification is not just a legal declaration but an actual interior transformation and "infusion" of grace that makes the person inherently righteous.
- "Contrary to what the heretics and schismatics claim, it is not by faith alone that we are justified and it is not with vain confidence in our justification that we can be certain of our salvation. Our salvation must be worked out to the end, and we are indeed further justified, after our initial justification by faith, by following the commandments of God, through "faith co-operating with good works" (Session VI, 10). Again, both initial and ongoing justification are only possible by grace."<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/whatever-happened-to-purgatory>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gospelcatholic.com/justification-catholic-teaching-from-the-council-of-trent#:~:text=Trent%20states%20that%20faith%20is,taught%20by%20the%20Catholic%20Church.>

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SANCTIFICATION

---

- We can define biblical sanctification as the Christian's lifelong process of being made more holy as the Holy Spirit works in and through the believer.
- "Sanctification may be defined as *that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works.*"<sup>10</sup>
- "Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life."<sup>11</sup>
- While our good works are there and they bring God glory and we become more like the image of Christ, they are ***not for our salvation***.
  - We must not confuse our sanctification with our justification.
- Once again, John Calvin, writing on our sanctification, "Repentance can thus well be defined: it is the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit."<sup>12</sup>
  - "Don't let the words "mortification" and "vivification" discourage you! Calvin was simply pointing out the negative and positive dimensions to sanctified Christian living. ***Mortification is putting sin to death. Vivification is living to righteousness by the power of the Spirit.***"<sup>13</sup>
- **The Old Testament idea of holy (or sanctify) meant to be separate or to be set apart.**
- "An example is found in Exodus 13:2: 'Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal.' Similarly, the holiness of God signifies his separateness from anything impure."<sup>14</sup>
  - The term for *consecrate* can also mean *sanctify* or *set apart*.
- The objects and other things in the OT were set apart and had a very specific purpose in mind...that purpose was for God's use.

---

<sup>10</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 532.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, John T. McNeil, ed., *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) III.xi.1, p. 725.

<sup>12</sup> Inst. III.iii.5, p. 597

<sup>13</sup> <https://brianghedges.com/a-double-grace-john-calvin-on-justification-and-sanctification/#:~:text=John%20Calvin%2C%20the%20sixteenth%2Dcentury,725.%5D>

<sup>14</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 898.

- To think of this now in the New Testament usage, when you are born again into the Christian life, you have *just been sanctified...or set apart specifically for the Master's use*.
- **This is why the NT uses the term *saints* so often when talking about Christians.**
  - The word for saints really means *holy ones*.
- This is where the OT and NT usage's part ways...Christians are saints and are holy ones...but they are not just set apart...in the NT it also carries with it the idea of moral goodness or spiritual worth.
  - In other words, "It designates not merely the fact that believers are formally set apart, or belong to Christ, but that they are then to conduct themselves accordingly. They are to live lives of purity and goodness."<sup>15</sup>
- While the Jews were called to be holy and to live holy, they did not have the Holy Spirit living in them to empower them to live holy unto the Lord.
- They were under the Law of God so that they would be separate from other nations but still had to make continual sacrifices to the Lord so that they would have their sins covered up.

### **Our sanctification, according to the Bible, has 3 aspects:<sup>16</sup>**

- **"In the past tense**, your sanctification has already happened. You are a saint – an identity for which you get no credit! God decisively acted by making you his very own in Christ. You have been saved."
  - **1 Corinthians 6:11** "Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."
  - **Acts 20:32** "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."
  - Past sanctification is vitally important as it talks about your position before God.
  - What is your position? "...regeneration is not only the impartation of spiritual life but is also a definitive cleansing from sin. That is why, in John 3:5, Jesus speaks of the new birth as being born of the *water* and the Spirit. In that passage he refers to Ezekiel's prophecy concerning regeneration, in which God promises not only to give his people a new heart and to cause his Spirit to indwell them but also to sprinkle clean water on them to purify them from their uncleanness."<sup>17</sup>
  - "The holy disposition that is strengthened throughout the believer's progressive sanctification is that same holy disposition that is born in the believer at regeneration. In this sense, regeneration is the beginning of sanctification."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> These three definitions taken from David Powlison's, *How Does Sanctification Work*, 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 632.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 633.

- In other words, you are becoming in real life what you already are in your standing before God.
- Past or positional sanctification is vital to understand because it means that our relationship with God and how God views us can't change.
- Not only that, but because of this new position and new person, you now are free from the bondage of sin and dominion of sin.
  - What this means is that you are now working to be free, but you already are free. Justification grants the believer freedom from the penalty of sin, initial sanctification grants the believer freedom from the power of sin.
  - **Romans 6:2** “May it never be! How shall *we who died to sin* still live in it?”
  - **Romans 6:11** “Even so *consider yourselves to be dead to sin*, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”
    - Consider: to reckon, count, to take into account.
    - In other words, we are commanded to judge and deem ourselves dead to sin.
    - We do this when we consider that we died in Christ and were then raised to life with Him through baptism.
- This idea is foundational if we are going to have victory in our progressive sanctification, or our continued life and battle with sin.
- **“In the present tense, your sanctification is now being worked out. God is working throughout your life – on a scale of days, years, and decades – to make you into the likeness of Jesus. You are being progressively sanctified. You are being saved.”**
  - This is where we are going to spend the majority of our time as we talk about your life becoming more and more conformed into the image of Christ.
  - **Philippians 2:12-13** “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; {13} for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”
  - **Hebrews 12:14** “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.”
  - **1 Peter 2:1-3** “Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, {2} like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, {3} if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”
  - **Galatians 5:24** “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

- “Though the penalty of sin is paid for and the power of sin is broken, the presence of sin still remains in the believer’s flesh and therefore must continually be put to death. Thus, the sanctification that begins definitively at regeneration necessarily continues throughout the entirety of the Christian life. This continuous aspect of sanctification is called progressive sanctification.”<sup>19</sup>
- “Believers are not conformed to the image of Christ in an instant, but rather, they experience a progressive transformation into his image by degrees. Thus, the Holy Spirit’s work in believers will cause them to increase in sanctification throughout their Christian lives.”<sup>20</sup>
- While we have been sanctified already before God, made holy and stand holy...we are constantly working this out on a day-to-day basis.
- This is one of the purposes of daily confession and repentance of sin.
- **1 John 1:9** “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
  - John is writing to Christians... **1 John 5:13** “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”
  - He is not saying, confess your sins so that you can get saved all over again. He is saying that life which has habitual confessing of sins is one that is growing in Christ.
  - As we confess our sins to the Lord, from His faithfulness and righteousness we are cleansed or made more separate from the world.
  - Kevin DeYoung describes this as, “Confession as a ‘Clean Hull’ on a ship. This process allows the believer to ‘move freely again’ in their relationship with God.” He also adds that this repentant lifestyle is evidence of a life with Christ.
- **“In the future tense**, your sanctification will be perfected. You will live. Your love will be perfected. You will see God’s face when he decisively acts to complete his work of conforming you to the image of Jesus. You will participate in the glory of God himself. You will be saved.”
  - **Philippians 1:6** “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”
  - **Philippians 3:20-21** “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; {21} who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”
  - **Jude 1:24** “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy...”

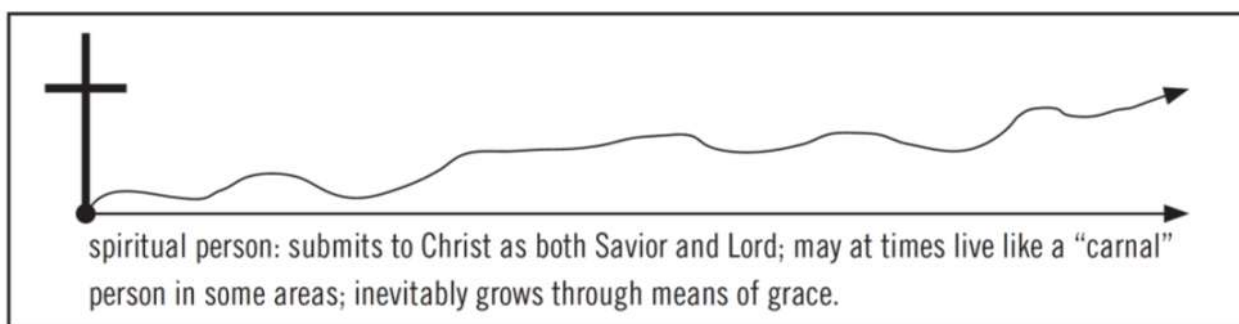
---

<sup>19</sup> MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 635.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 636.

- **1 John 3:2** “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”
- “Future sanctification is the completion of the process of sanctification and results in the total elimination of sin from the believer.”<sup>21</sup>
- Our sanctification today is based upon the completion of our sanctification in the future.
- If we think that we are not going to be like Christ or see Christ, then our striving for holiness and mortifying sin will not take priority in our daily living.

**Sanctification is progressive in nature.**<sup>22</sup>



	Justification	Progressive Sanctification
Quality	Instantly declared righteous	Gradually made righteous
	Objective, judicial (non-experiential): legal, forensic position	Subjective, experiential: daily experience
	External: outside the believer	Internal: inside the believer
	Christ’s righteousness imputed, received judicially	Christ’s righteousness imparted, worked out experientially
	Instantly removes sin’s guilt and penalty	Gradually removes sin’s pollution and power
	Does not change character	Gradually transforms character
Quantity	All Christians share the same legal standing	Christians are at different stages of growth
Duration	A single, instantaneous completed act: once-for-all-time, never repeated	A continuing process: gradual, maturing, lifelong

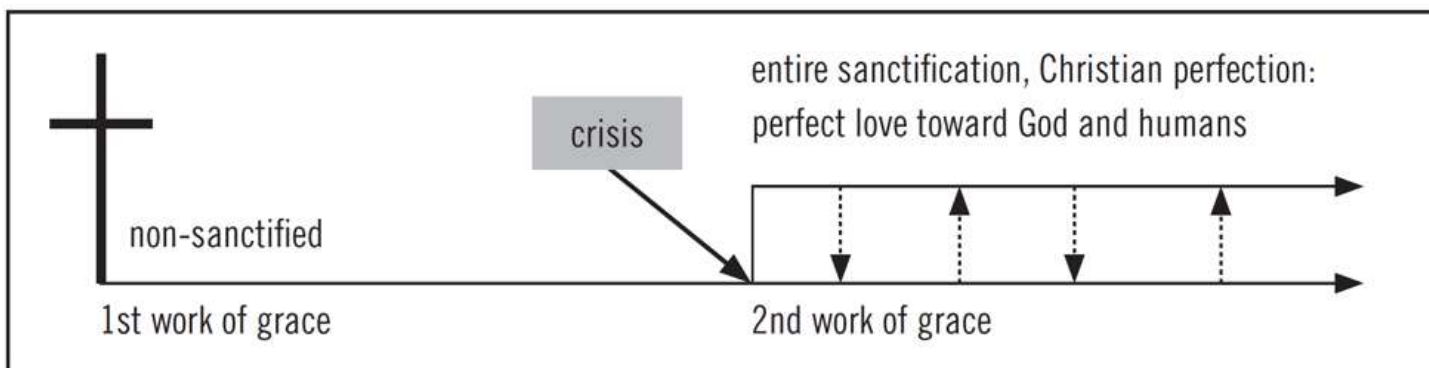
<sup>21</sup> Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things*, vol. 3 (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 156.

<sup>22</sup> Both charts found at <https://biblebasedchristcentered.wordpress.com/models-of-sanctification/>

- For our time studying sanctification, it is progressive or present sanctification that we are going to be talking about. We are not who we are going to be, but we are working our way there.
- “There must be a constant and increasing appreciation that though sin still remains it does not have the mastery. There is a total difference between surviving sin and reigning sin, the regenerate in conflict with sin and the unregenerate complacent to sin. It is one thing for sin to live in us: it is another for us to live in sin.”<sup>23</sup>
- To think that you can become free from sin or somehow stop sinning will only bring pride or condemnation.
- Pride to say that you have no sin or condemnation to see your sin and think you should be free from it.

### **Sanctification is not a roadmap to perfection:**

- Some models for sanctification over the years do well to separate justification from sanctification, but they also fail to define it biblically.
- “Sanctification is not a “second blessing” or a “second definite work of grace” wherein the carnal nature of a believer is eradicated as in the Wesleyan idea of “perfect love.” (John Wesley taught that there is a spiritual state where the only motivation or the only governing disposition of the believer is love for God.) Charles Finney’s eradicationism, or “entire sanctification,” is also rejected. (This is usually interpreted as freedom from all known sin.)<sup>24</sup>
- “John Wesley (1703–1791) is the father of views that chronologically separate the time a person becomes a Christian from the time progressive sanctification begins. Wesley taught “Christian perfection,” which as he qualifies does not refer to absolute sinless perfection. *Christian* perfection is a type of perfection that only Christians can experience—as opposed to Adamic perfection, angelic perfection, or God’s unique, absolute perfection. The way Wesley qualifies Christian perfection hinges on how he narrowly defines sin as “a voluntary transgression of a known law.” He limits sin to only *intentional* sinful acts.”<sup>25</sup>



<sup>23</sup> John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 145.

<sup>24</sup> McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, vol. 3, 122.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/models-of-sanctification/> (also chart)