

- Notice the above model from Wesley. You are saved at a point in time, but you have not begun the sanctification process.
  - This can be described as a carnal Christian or someone who is not “Spirit-filled” in this model.
- When the “crisis” hits, this is a pivotal moment in the life of the believer. This is when the one who has been saved fully gives their life over to the Lord. Some describe this as the “letting go and letting God” moment.
- Once the believer has this “second work of grace,” they are then on a higher level and able to live a “perfect life” and love God and other perfectly.
- “Perfectionists hold that it is possible to come to a state where a believer does not sin, and that indeed some Christians do arrive at that point. This does not mean that the person cannot sin, but that indeed he or she does not sin. Nor does this mean that there is no further need for the means of grace or for the Holy Spirit, that there is no longer any temptation or struggle with the innate tendency toward evil, or that there is no room for further spiritual growth. It does mean, however, that it is possible not to sin, and that some believers actually do abstain from all evil.”<sup>1</sup>
- There are large denominations that teach that it is possible for a Christian to longer sin. They believe that in this life, one can reach a point where they are no longer sinning.
- **Why is this such a dangerous teaching?**
- There is a practical problem, a unity problem, and a spiritual problem with this teaching.
- **Practically**, it focuses only on our work and/or behavior.
  - If one is doing then things must be good.
- **Unity**, this has created divisions and classes within the Christian community.
  - There are some who think they no longer sin and some who are not yet being sanctified, and then those who are still sinning but trying to grow in these areas.
  - This can create disunity, jealousy, and bitterness in the community.
- **Spiritually**, the nature of sin, as Jesus defines it, is not *only* about our external works or our behaviors, but it is also about what is going on inside of us.
  - “Jesus made quite clear that even the thoughts and attitudes that we have are sinful if they are less than perfectly in accord with the mind of the almighty and completely holy God.”<sup>2</sup>
- While I believe that a born-again person *can and should* say no to sin and yes to righteousness, and I also believe that the longer one walks with the Lord, this will become more and more prevalent in life, it is very doubtful that anyone can attain this level of perfection before eternity.

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<sup>1</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 900.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 901.

- In fact, I also believe that the longer we walk with the Lord, the more and more we start to realize how much or how often we do sin against Him in our daily life.
- The Bible is clear that both truths do exist, we are to be holy now but also be repentant of our sin now.
- Jesus states in **Matthew 5:48** “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
  - Instead of seeing this verse from Jesus as a command, in the context, Jesus is demonstrating the impossibility of being perfect based upon our own righteousness.
  - In fact, I believe that Jesus’ words are not to call us to a prideful reorganization of our own spiritual perfection, but just the opposite...since we know that we are not perfect; we are poor in spirit and need the righteousness of Christ.
- **1 John 1:8-10** “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”
  - “That this passage was written to believers renders the statement that there is sin in all of us the more cogent (strong or convincing).”<sup>3</sup>

### **Some Examples From Church History:**

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- **John Bunyan (1628–1688)**
- In his final years, Bunyan’s reflections in his journals and his famous *Dying Sayings*<sup>4</sup> (from 1688) focus on the sheer weight of indwelling sin:
  - **On the unworthiness of his best moments:** "There is enough sin in my best prayer to send the whole world to hell".
  - **On self-knowledge at death:** "The death of Christ giveth us the best discovery of ourselves... and the most clear discovery of the dreadful nature of our sins".
  - **On his own "vile" nature:** He urged believers to "know yourself—what a vile, horrible, abominable sinner you are," teaching that you cannot truly know Christ’s love until you see the "badness of your nature"
  - He wrote that when God visits a soul with forgiveness, it "removeth the guilt, but increaseth the sense of thy filth," which causes the believer to "**both rejoice and tremble**". He famously recorded that during his darkest times in prison, he had "sweet sights of the forgiveness of my sins" that allowed him to "**laugh at destruction**".

<sup>3</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 901.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/bunyan/Mr.%20John%20Bunyan's%20Dying%20Sayings%20-%20John%20Bunyan.pdf>

- **John Newton (1725–1807)**
- Newton's most famous words were said as his mind was failing in old age<sup>5</sup>:
  - **The "Two Things"**: "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior". (written in 1807 before he died)
  - **On his progress**: He famously wrote, "I am not what I ought to be... but still I am not what I once used to be".
  - **His Epitaph**: He wrote his own gravestone inscription to say he was once an "infidel and libertine" who was preserved by "rich mercy"
  - Newton viewed his own sinfulness as the dark backdrop that made Christ's grace shine more brightly. He wrote, "I am not what I ought to be... but by the grace of God I am what I am," finding peace in the fact that **"Christ has taken our nature into Heaven to represent us"**
- **John Owen (1616–1683)**
  - Owen spent his later years writing on the "mortification" of sin, believing that the battle never truly stops:
  - **On lifelong struggle**: "The choicest believers... should also make it their business all of their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin".
  - **On sin's persistence**: "Indwelling sin always abides while we are in this world; therefore it is always to be mortified".
  - **On self-loathing**: He argued that as men see the power of sin in themselves, they will "loathe it, and themselves, and the more earnest will be their pursuit of grace"
- **Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686)**
  - Watson's writings on repentance emphasize that a mature believer's heart is increasingly tender and broken over sin.
  - **On God's view of us**: "We are never more precious in God's eyes when we are lepers in our own".
  - **On the depth of sin**: He wrote that some live many years but "never know what a broken heart means," whereas the mature saint has an "agony of soul for sin".
- For these writers, saying they "deserved to be kept out of heaven" was not an expression of hopelessness, but a recognition of grace.
- You will not great men of the faith throughout church history who see themselves as those who have been free from sin.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/amazing-grace-john-newton-and-his-great-hymn/>

- The point is simple, we are not who we were, we are not who we are going to be, but we are on the way to getting there day by day.

### **The aim of our sanctification is to make us more like Christ.**

- The purpose of our sanctification is simple...*restore the image of God in fallen man*. Even though sin has affected God's image in us; we can grow more and more into His image.
  - "A good illustration of the image of God in fallen man is that of an automobile windshield that has shattered. The glass remains there but it is so damaged that it will no longer function properly."<sup>6</sup>
- **Colossians 3:10** "...and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him..."
- **James 3:9** "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God..."
- "Present sanctification involves an imitation of Christ which entails a complete contradiction of the old life of sin."<sup>7</sup>
- "Sanctification is the spiritual transformation of the mind and the affections that in turn redirects the will and the actions."<sup>8</sup>
- There are a few areas that we will be able to see this change in our hearts and minds:
- **A Total Transformation...**all who are in Christ will be made more like Christ.
  - **Romans 8:29** "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren..."
- **A Renewed Mindset...**thinking more like God and less like the world.
  - **Romans 12:2** "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."
- **A Renewed Love...**learning more and more to love others as Christ does.
  - **Ephesians 5:1-2** "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; {2} and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."
- **A Continual Transformation...**sanctification does not stop in this life.
  - **2 Corinthians 3:18** "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/man-as-the-image-of-god/>

<sup>7</sup> Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 145.

<sup>8</sup> MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 640.

- **A New Dependence**...becoming more like Christ means that we learn to depend more on Him.
  - **John 15:5** “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

## **Sanctification is God working through the Holy Spirit and Man Obeying**

- **1 Thessalonians 5:23** “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
  - “Specifically it is the Holy Spirit who is the agent of sanctification”<sup>9</sup>
- **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.”
  - “That is to say, God works for the believer to sanctify not merely his external actions but also his internal desires.”<sup>10</sup>
- **Galatians 5:16** “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”
  - “It is imperative that we realize our complete dependence upon the Holy Spirit.”<sup>11</sup>
  - The ministry and work of the Holy Spirit has been so abused and neglected that many really have no idea the role that He plays in the life of the believer.
  - It is vitally important that we know what the Bible says about how the Spirit works in us and how we then respond to His leading.
  - “It is the peculiar prerogative and function of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ by taking of the things of Christ and showing them unto the people of God.”<sup>12</sup>
- “One might conclude...that sanctification is completely a passive matter on the believer’s part. This is not so, however. While sanctification is exclusively of God, that is, its power rests entirely on his holiness, the believer is constantly exhorted to work and to grow in the matters pertaining to salvation.”<sup>13</sup>
  - Sanctification is not a “let go and let God” mentality. There is very hard work to do in each believer as they are shown their sin, their sinful patterns, their sinful hearts, and so on.
  - From that work, believers then, through the power of the Spirit, are enabled to not just kill that sin but then live for Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> Murray, *Redemption*, 146.

<sup>10</sup> MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 639.

<sup>11</sup> Murray, *Redemption*, 147.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>13</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 900.

- “In a most general sense, any act of obedience to Christ through the Spirit promotes spiritual growth and therefore might be loosely construed as a means of grace. Technically, present sanctification is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit using the means of Scripture as appropriated by obedient faith.”<sup>14</sup>

### **The primary means of sanctification is the Word of God.**

- **John 17:17** “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”
- Jesus’ prayer was that God’s Word would be living and active in the hearts and minds of the believers so that they would become more and more like Him.
- “The primary means of sanctification is the Word of God. Other means may be secondary at best but are still beholden to the truth of Scripture for any advantage in denying sin and in promoting holiness and spiritual maturity.”<sup>15</sup>
- We can never underestimate the power of God’s Word working in and through our hearts, minds, and lives.
  - As the Word is learned and studied and applied into believer’s lives, they are then being transformed into what the Word is pointing them to...namely Jesus Christ.
- “Other means that bring one into conjunction with and greater obedience to the Word of God are the preaching and teaching of the Word of God by gifted individuals (Eph 4:11–16); Bible reading and meditation (Ps 1:2; Matt 4:4); prayer (Eph 6:18; Phil 4:6); and assembly with other Christians for worship and fellowship (Heb 10:24–25; Eph 5:18–20).”<sup>16</sup>
- “Sanctification cannot be carried out in isolation from other believers or from the community of faith.”<sup>17</sup>
- “If believers are to grow by the ‘sincere milk of the word’ they must frequent the place where the word is publicly read, preached and expounded.”<sup>18</sup>
  - **1 Peter 2:2** “...like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation...”
- “We may define sanctification as that gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, involving our responsible participation, by which He delivers us *as justified sinners* from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God, and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to Him.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 151.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>17</sup> Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 760.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 61.