

Foundations: Bible Truths for Christian Growth

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The Meaning of Sanctification

The word *sanctification* sounds very theological and is therefore somewhat intimidating. In reality, the concept is very simple. Sanctification means to be “set apart.” In both Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek, the same root word that is translated as *sanctify* is also translated as *holy*. So to sanctify something is simply to *make it holy*.

The *separation* (being set apart) described by sanctification has both a negative and positive aspect to it:

1. Through sanctification, you are separated from sin.
2. Through sanctification, you are separated unto God.

“Forsaking all others...”

An apt illustration to this separation from one thing and to another is marriage. At the moment a bride is married, from whom does she separate herself?

To whom does she separate herself?

The Old Testament Term for Sanctification

The Old Testament Hebrew word for sanctification is *qadash*. It is often used to describe the process by which the Tabernacle, Temple, their tools and priests were ceremonially purified for service to God—they were *consecrated* to Him (another translation of *qadash*).

What items were “set apart” unto God in the following passages?

Genesis 2:3 _____

Exodus 13:2 _____

Exodus 28:3 _____
(The word “consecrate” is qadash.)

Exodus 29:44 _____

Leviticus 11:44–45 _____

The Old Testament teaches two primary lessons regarding sanctification:

1. God *demand*s holiness (**Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7**).
2. God *provides* holiness (**Exodus 31:13b**).

Jehovah Mekadishkem

*Exodus 31:13 describes one of the many names of the Lord: **Jehovah Mekadishkem**—“The Lord Who Sanctifies You.” What a blessed truth that the very holiness which God demands, He also provides through Jesus Christ!*

The New Testament Term for Sanctification

The New Testament Greek term for *sanctification* is very similar to its Hebrew counterpart. The Greek word for sanctification is *hagiazō*, a derivative of the word *hagios*, which means holy. Once again, to be sanctified means to be (or become) holy.

The Need for Sanctification

Chapter 9 described your battle with your flesh. Your flesh is the natural bent toward selfishness and sin with which you were born. When you trusted Christ as Savior, you gained a new nature (the Spirit), but your old nature (the flesh) remains with you—your “old man” moved over, but not out. Your flesh is very much alive and well.

How is your heart described in **Jeremiah 17:9**?

*The reality and pervasiveness of your sin is generally referred to as **total depravity**. It means that every part of your person has been affected by sin.*

How does **Jeremiah 17:9** stack up against the popular concept that people are “basically good”?

Are Christians “basically good”? _____
Romans 3:10–18 describes the sinful condition of all people—the condition that is retained in your own heart. How are you described in this passage?

The Apostle Paul lamented his experience with his flesh in **Romans 7:18–25**. Notice that he acknowledged that his heart was evil rather than good (v. 18), admitted his tendency to do evil rather than good (v. 19–23) and concluded that he was a “wretched man” (v. 24). Surely you can relate to the experience of Paul. Your flesh is powerful!

Christian author Jim Berg states the following truths from Scripture to clearly demonstrate your need for sanctification:

1. Your flesh will **deceive** you (James 1:14, 22; Jeremiah 17:9).
2. Your flesh will **defile** you (Galatians 5:19–21).
3. Your flesh will **destroy** you (Galatians 6:7–8).³⁴

Explain the principle of sowing and reaping from **Galatians 6:7–8** in your own words (“*corruption*” in v. 8 means “*destruction*”). _____

The stakes are high! The existence and wickedness of your flesh make your need for sanctification great.

Positional Sanctification

It is essential that you understand the difference between *positional sanctification*—sanctification of position, and *progressive sanctification*—sanctification of lifestyle. Scripture teaches that there is a sense in which you are already sanctified. Find the English equivalents for the following Greek words:

1 **Corinthians 1:2**—“to those who have been _____ (*hagiazō*) in Christ Jesus, _____ (*hagioi*) by calling.”

Note: A New Testament “saint” is simply any Christian.

³⁴ Jim Berg, *Changed into His Image* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1999), pp. 38–42.

1 Corinthians 6:11—“But you are washed, but you were _____ (*hagiazō*), but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

1 Peter 2:9—“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a _____ (*hagios*) nation, a people for God’s own possession; that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

These passages teach that in God’s sight, you are already holy. That is, God considers you to be as holy as Jesus Christ is because you are “*in Christ*” (**1 Corinthians 1:2**). Remember from previous lessons, this is called *imputed righteousness*—Christ’s righteousness credited to your account³⁵. You are *positionally* sanctified. The challenge is to make your *practice* line up with your *position*. That is what we call *progressive sanctification*.

³⁵ It is important that you understand the difference between justification and progressive sanctification. Justification is the **one-time act** by which God **declares** you to be righteous. Progressive sanctification is the **life-long process** by which God **makes** you to be righteous in daily living. Almost **all** man-made religions confuse these two, resulting in attempts to earn justification.

Progressive Sanctification

Princess or Pauper?

According to Russian legend, Anastasia Romanov—the daughter of the last Russian Tsar—was lost when her family was executed during the Bolshevik Revolution in the early 1900's. Although royalty, Anastasia is said to have lived a life of poverty. She was a princess by position, but a pauper by practice.

The story of Anastasia may or may not be true, but it is a striking illustration of the experience of most believers. Though God sees us as pure as Christ, our practice is sadly inconsistent with our position. Although we have been born into God's family and have been given the position and privileges of children, we often live in spiritual poverty and enslavement to sin. *Progressive sanctification*, which is also called *practical sanctification*, is the process by which believers are made to *experience* in daily life the holiness which is already theirs positionally. As you are sanctified, you will begin to enjoy the riches that are yours as a member of God's household.

The balance between positional and progressive sanctification is communicated in **1 Peter**. In **1 Peter 2:9** you are described as “holy.” Yet, Scripture repeats a command two times in **1 Peter 1:15–16**. What is it? _____

In what areas of your lifestyle (“behavior”) are you to be holy? _____

One area of your life which Scripture commands to be “set apart” unto God is sexual purity.

1 Thessalonians 3:11–4:8 deals with purity and mentions some form of the words “holy” or “sanctification” no less than six times. What do the

following verses from **1 Thessalonians** teach about sanctification?

4:3 _____

4:7 _____

Progressive sanctification has everything to do with how you live on a daily basis. The areas of your life that are not holy need to become holy. You must become increasingly “set apart” from sin and to God. In a nutshell, Scripture repeatedly commands you to *change* your character, thinking and behavior. The words which Scripture uses to describe that change may differ (*grow, be transformed, walk, put off and put on, etc.*), but the concept is the same: In your nature you are sinful. You must change to be holy!

Sanctification is “the Christianizing of the Christian.”³⁶

The Goal of Sanctification

Scripture does not command change for change’s sake. There is an objective biblical goal for sanctification. God’s purpose for you is that you become increasingly like Jesus Christ. How is that purpose stated in the following verses?

Philippians 2:5 _____

Romans 8:29 _____

³⁶ Author Unknown.

Happy or Holy?

God's major concern is not that you be happy, but that you be Christlike.

Romans 8:28 is often taken out of context. God does indeed work all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. But

what is that purpose? Verse 29 reveals that it is conformity to Christ-likeness. Romans 8:28, then, teaches that God uses even bad things to change you into the image of Christ.

2 Timothy 2:21 explains that your becoming more like Christ should lead to action. According to this verse, what does sanctification prepare you for?

The Process of Sanctification

1. Sanctification is a work of God.

It must never be thought that sanctification is something that you seek to accomplish by sheer human effort. Indeed, almost the entire book of Galatians teaches that just as your salvation was begun by faith, so it continues by faith, not works (especially note **Galatians 3:2–3**). How do the following passages address your inability to make yourself holy?

*“True Christian character is produced **in** the believer, but not **by** the believer.”*

Lewis Sperry Chafer ³⁷

Romans 7:18 _____

³⁷ *He That is Spiritual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 46.

Galatians 5:17

Notice the solution in verses 22–23: “the fruit of (which is produced by) the Spirit.”

Exodus 31:13b

According to **Romans 15:16**, **2 Corinthians 3:18** and **1 Peter 1:2**, who is it that accomplishes your sanctification? Who works to change you into the image of Christ? _____

“The Holy Spirit of God uses the Holy Word of God to make you more like the Holy Son of God.”

Ken Collier

What a tremendous encouragement to know that God is actively working in you...even today! What promise does He give you in **Philippians 1:6**?

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 offers a prayer for sanctification followed by a promise. What is the promise?

Knocking Off the Rough Edges

Sanctification is comparable to the work a sculptor performs on a piece of stone. The sculptor carefully—though firmly—chisels away what is harsh and unbecoming in order to produce a work of art. The Holy Spirit of God is progressively chiseling away your carnality and selfishness in order to make you like Christ. While having your rough edges chiseled away is often painful, it is always rewarding.

God uses a variety of tools to accomplish His work of sanctification. According to the following verses, what are they?

John 17:17 _____

Ephesians 5:26 _____

Mark 14:38 _____

1 Peter 1:7 _____

Proverbs 27:17 _____

2. Sanctification requires your participation.

Although it is God who makes you holy, don't imagine that you are passive. Remember the study on Spirit-filling: You must allow the Lord to control you and sanctify you. Which of God's tools previously mentioned are you able and responsible to apply to yourself? _____

Romans 6:19c addresses your cooperation with God in the process of sanctification. What are you commanded to do? _____

How is the balance between God's work and your participation communicated in **Philippians 2:12–13**?

2:12 _____
Note: "work out your salvation" is a command to demonstrate that you have been saved, not to save yourself.

2:13 _____

How can the two verses both be true? God works _____ you (v. 13) so that you can work _____ (v. 12) as a demonstration of your salvation.

3. Sanctification works from the inside out.

While it is essential that you develop standards of Christian conduct (such as activities you will or will not participate in or places you will or will not go), you must never equate outward standards with holiness. It is entirely possible to follow a strict list of “do’s and don’ts”, yet be carnal. Why? Because God wants a change of heart, not merely a change of habit.

The Greek word translated as “changed” in **2 Corinthians 3:18** is *metamorphoo*, the root of our English word “metamorphosis”. It describes a change in nature, not merely appearance. Sanctification is not merely looking or acting holy—it is *becoming* holy. Sanctification works from the inside out, not the outside in. God repeatedly states in Scripture that He desires a godly heart, not merely right conduct. Explain the following verses in your own words:

Isaiah 1:11–15 _____

Isaiah 29:13 _____

Amos 5:21–23 _____

Psalm 51:16–17 _____

Ephesians 3:16 _____

1 Peter 3:3–4 _____

Matthew 15:18 _____

Proverbs 4:23 _____

You must not misunderstand this portion of the lesson. Are standards of Christian conduct important? Yes—and they should be high! Yet, they must be the result of a sanctified heart, not a substitute for it. God’s desire for your life is not merely a change of *habit*—it is much, much more! He desires a change of *heart*, which will in turn bring about a change of habit.

Inside Out
God doesn’t merely want a change of habit. He wants a change of heart, which will lead to a change of habit.

How does that fact affect your understanding of your own sanctification? _____

Is it important to have high moral standards? Yes! But can they make you holy? No! On the other hand, someone who is genuinely holy will have high moral standards. Holiness of heart results in holiness of habit!

How should realizing that outward change is a reflection and result of heart change affect your relationship with others—especially new Christians?

4. Sanctification is a process.

2 Corinthians 3:18 teaches that you are changed into the image of Christ “from glory to glory.” What does that mean? It means that progressive sanctification is a process. It is not immediate. Rather, you will be continually progressing in your Christ-likeness from the moment of your salvation to the moment you are with Christ in heaven.

According to **Philippians 1:6**, when will God finish the work that He is doing in you? _____

Note: That is, the day when Christ appears to “rapture” His church.

The fact that God is continuing His work in you should lead you to several conclusions:

1. Lack of progress is regression.

You are responsible to continue growing more like Christ, regardless of how long you have been a Christian. There is no room for stagnancy. The status quo is unacceptable. You must continually progress toward Christ-likeness.

2. Don’t expect immediate sanctification—especially from others.

The tendency of many Christians is to expect *progressive*

*To God, a heart of love.
To others, a heart of grace.*

sanctification from themselves, but *immediate* sanctification from everyone else. However, it is interesting to note that the sins that frustrate us most in the lives of others are often the very sins that we excuse in our own lives. You must exhibit patience and grace toward others, allowing the Lord to have time to work in their lives.

3. Failure need not be final.

Quickly read the book of Philemon, the apostle Paul's account of the life of a man named Onesimus. Notice the change that the gospel brought to his life. Verse 11 contains a tremendous message of hope: *One who has been useless can be made useful by God's grace!*

How should the testimony of Onesimus affect your relationships with others—particularly those in sin?

4. Complete sanctification will not be accomplished in this life.

Some teachers claim that it is possible to stop sinning—to “live above sin.” However, in the words of a wise old saint, “the only way to ‘live above sin’ is to rent a room over a pool hall.” Although you are commanded to strive for holiness, don't be so arrogant as to claim to have achieved it.

What do **1 John 1:8, 10** say about someone who claims to be above sin? _____

According to **1 John 3:2**, when will we finally be like Christ in our character and conduct? _____

Only when you are with Christ in glory will you be sinless. However, until that time you must progressively sin less.

For a thorough and practical study on progressive sanctification, read Jim Berg's book, *Changed into His Image* (Bob Jones University Press, 1999).

Scripture Memory

Romans 8:28-29

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 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;

1 Peter 1:15-16

But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; ¹⁶because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Check Your Progress

What are the three most significant lessons that you have learned in this Bible study? Why are they important?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Answer the following questions to measure your understanding of sanctification:

1. To be *holy* is to be “set apart.” Through sanctification, you are progressively separated from _____ and unto _____. (p. 182)

2. Explain *positional sanctification*, the Bible’s teaching that you are holy. (pp. 185–186) _____

3. Explain *progressive sanctification*, the Bible’s teaching that you are becoming holy. (pp. 187–188)

4. What is the goal of sanctification? (pp. 189)

5. What are some of the “tools” that God uses to sanctify you? (p. 191) _____

6. In what sense is sanctification a “cooperative effort” between you and God? (p. 191–192) _____

7. What is the relationship between the *internal* working of God’s Spirit and the *external* working of the obedient Christian? (pp. 192–194) _____

8. When can you expect to be “sinless”? (p. 195)

9. When must you begin to “sin less”? (p. 196) _____

10. Check off the following verses only when you can say them from memory:

Romans 8:28–29

1 Peter 1:15–16

Do you believe that you know this material well enough to teach it to someone else? _____ If not, review it until you do!