

## Sanctification

In recent weeks we have been looking at critical aspects of the doctrines of salvation, the infinite price of our redemption, the total surrender of our will in repentance, and the eternal security of our salvation. The last thing we will consider in the theology of salvation is the doctrine of sanctification. The word *sanctification* comes from a word that basically means to *set apart*, or *to be holy*. Sanctification refers to being set apart for God and living a life for Him.

Sanctification, or becoming more holy, has sometimes been confused with salvation itself. This is because of the frustration some Christian leaders have had with hypocrisy and shallow faith. Their conclusion is that if people are not holy then they must be lost and their mistaken solution is to get people to behave better in order to be saved. All through church history, Christians have struggled with mixing salvation and sanctification. The Judaizers, in Paul's time, demanded law-keeping for salvation. The Donatists, in the 300s, rejected those who had lapsed due to persecution, and the Donatist leaders made holiness the condition of belonging to Christ. In the Middle Ages, salvation was tied to sacraments and penance to cure hypocrisy. Even Reformers and Puritans from the 1500s in their zeal for seriousness, sometimes confused sanctification with being saved. Wesleyans looked for "entire sanctification" as proof of *full* salvation, and modern legalists have made strict rules the test of true faith. The pattern is clear: whenever leaders were rightly frustrated and made holiness the *basis* of salvation, the Gospel was clouded. Salvation is by grace through faith alone. Sanctification should follow, but it must never be confused with the root of our salvation in Christ. We need to carefully define sanctification.

When we talk about sanctification we are usually referring to the process of becoming *more like* Christ. There are actually *three* ways we speak of

sanctification and becoming like Him: There is Positional, Progressive, and Perfected Sanctification. One reason that I have saved sanctification last for this short series on salvation is because I wanted to emphasize in the other messages that salvation is, first and last, settled by faith in Christ's work on the cross and not by any effort from us. We will look at three ways the Bible describes our sanctification as Positional Sanctification when we are saved and separated from the world by being in Christ. With that settled, it doesn't mean that there is no work to do! Now we go to work on ourselves to become more like Christ. That is Progressive Sanctification as we separate ourselves from worldliness. Finally, there will be Perfected Sanctification which is when we will be glorified and in heaven.

## 1. Positional Sanctification -

When you read the Bible you have noticed that it doesn't always sound like English that you would typically use. When that happens, there might be a special theological point that is made. You're reading along and you come to the phrase "in Christ" and you might be tempted to gloss over it, but there is a world of significance in that phrase. This is what is meant by *positional* sanctification. Because our *position* is in Christ, we are separate *from* the world, separated *unto* God.

John 17:16-17 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

By our faith in the truths of God's Word we are saved and sanctified. We are set apart. We are made one with God, by being *in* Christ.

John 17:20-23 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21 That they all may be one; as

thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

The spiritual blessings we have of eternal life, the resurrection, being made righteous are due to the fact that we are *in Christ*.

Eph 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ:

It's not that Jesus made us eternally alive, but we have life because *He* is the way, the truth, and the life and we are *in Him*.

John 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

It is not just that He will resurrect us someday. He *is* the resurrection and we will participate in *His* resurrection at the rapture because we are *in Him*.

1Cor 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

It is not that we have been *made* righteous: we participate in *His* righteousness because we are in Him. We are sanctified in Christ, set apart,

called saints, or set apart ones in 1 Cor 1:2.

1Cor 1:30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

Positional Sanctification is the once-for-all setting apart of the believer at the moment of salvation. It is judicial and complete, not a process, and it never increases or decreases. Don't confuse your current struggles with your standing in Christ. Your position is settled. Now you are called to grow into what you already are.

Heb 10:10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

## 2. Progressive Sanctification -

The next aspect of sanctification has to do with *growing* in Christ. This kind of sanctification is about maturing spiritually. It's important to recognize that spiritual maturity is not just about outward behavior but inward transformation. Many people today mistakenly label any strong Christian standards (such as modesty, honesty, or disciplined living) as *legalism*, but that confuses Biblical holiness with a false gospel. *True* legalism, in its most dangerous form, teaches that salvation is earned by works rather than received by grace through faith. But there is also a more subtle, weaker form of legalism that plagues many believers: it is the idea that we can maintain God's *approval* or *blessing* by keeping up outward good behavior, even while our hearts quietly harbor bitterness, gossip, pride, jealousy, or self-righteousness. This kind of legalism focuses on appearances and performance, while ignoring the deeper matters of the heart. God does not simply look for external conformity. He desires a clean heart, genuine love, and humble dependence on His grace.

Matt 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and **not to leave the other undone.**

Jesus is not saying that the outward obediences are not unimportant, but that it is coming from a transformed heart.

Isa 29:13 Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

We are sanctified, or set apart positionally, but we are being sanctified *progressively* by becoming more like Christ day by day. What is saved now is our spirit. John told Nicodemus,

John 3:6-7 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

We are looking forward to being like Him in the resurrection, in the meantime, we work to purify ourselves.

2Cor 3:17-18 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

There is part of us that does not sin. That is the spirit, the seed that was born in us when we trusted Christ as our Savior.

1John 3:9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his

seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God [The spirit is the part that is born again].

However, there will be a struggle for us between the spirit and *the flesh*. As important as *positional* sanctification is, and also what I will later describe as *perfected* sanctification, the trouble we have with *growing in* Christ is where we have the most difficult time.

Gal 5:16-25 *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

And then Paul gives a list of struggles. He concludes,

24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

A lot of our failing comes from not *deliberately* and *proactively* choosing growth. Look at what Peter says:

2Pet 1:2-10 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith

virtue; and to virtue knowledge;  
6 And to knowledge temperance;  
and to temperance patience; and  
to patience godliness;

7 And to godliness brotherly  
kindness; and to brotherly  
kindness charity.

8 For if these things be in you,  
and abound, they make *you that*  
*ye shall* neither *be* barren nor  
unfruitful in the knowledge of  
our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 But he that lacketh these things  
is blind, and cannot see afar off,  
and hath forgotten that he was  
purged from his old sins.

10 Wherefore the rather, brethren,  
give diligence to make your  
calling and election sure: for if ye  
do these things, ye shall never  
fall: **[There is a whole lot of  
growing described here.]**

Peter teaches that if we grow by *adding* to our faith, we will grow in an intimate relationship by knowing Jesus Christ. He tells us to be *diligent*...that is we must be *deliberate* in our growth.

One of the first ways to grow is by attending to our growth through the regular church services. There is very careful planning to deliver God's Word here. The teachers carefully hone their messages. There is a schedule for the delivery of lessons. There is planning for the variety of messages and needs. There are gourmet spiritual meals prepared. You don't try to survive on one physical meal a week. Why do that spiritually by just attending one spiritual meal a week?

We can't complain about the church of God and not put the time in building relationships.

We stay stunted in our spiritual growth when we don't test God with the tithe and discover His miraculous power.

We don't personally dig into the Scriptures to get understanding.

When we *do* attend to overcoming the struggles of the flesh, our families will be strong, our churches will be strong, and our nation will be blessed when God's people are given over to sanctification.

1Pet 1:15-16 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, ye holy; for I am holy.

For many years, scientists believed that the brain was fixed – that once we reached adulthood, we stopped growing brain cells and our mental capacity was set. We now know much more about how the brain is a marvel of creation, constantly adapting and capable of forming new neural pathways through the growth of dendrites and axons, the tiny branches and fibers that connect brain cells. While we may not grow taller or stronger as we age, our brains can continue to develop, especially when we learn new things or change old habits. It's amazing that the brain can recall vivid "videos" from decades ago – moments, conversations, smells, and even emotions as if they happened yesterday. This speaks to the wonder of how we are made. But even more amazing is this: we are not just brains. We are minds.

Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the **renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

The mind is a function of the spirit, the immaterial part of us that survives death. The brain is the physical instrument our spirit uses during this life. So when we renew our minds through truth and godly thinking, we're not just having better thoughts. We're actually reshaping our brains. That's the miracle of neuroplasticity: that God designed us not only to be transformed spiritually, but even to experience that renewal physically in our brains.

### 3. Perfected Sanctification -

Our sanctification is finally perfected when we will be resurrected and our whole body and soul and spirit will be



set apart from this world.

Rom 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* **conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

Jesus was resurrected, the firstborn from among the dead, with all the rest of the saints to follow. I will touch on this in later messages about the End Times, so I will not dwell on this here. One of the greatest joys that awaits us is our perfected sanctification: the moment when we are finally and forever made like Christ in every way. When the Lord calls us home, whether by death or in the Rapture, we will be glorified. Our bodies will be transformed, our sin nature gone, and our fellowship with God unhindered. No more inner battles, no more divided affections, no more struggle between flesh and spirit. We will be entirely holy, completely whole, and eternally satisfied in His presence. Every tear will be wiped away, every burden lifted, and we will worship without distraction, serve without failure, and rejoice without end. In that day, faith will become sight, and the process of sanctification will be complete: not by our effort, but by His power. The hope of our perfected sanctification is not only a future promise; it's the fuel that keeps us pressing on today, knowing that the best is yet to come.

If you are here today and you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, then understand this: sanctification begins not with effort, but with surrender. You don't grow into salvation, you are saved in a moment when you turn from your sin and believe on Jesus Christ. When you do, God places you in Christ. You are joined to Him, made one with Him, and from that union flows new life. He doesn't just give you a second chance; He gives you a new heart, a new spirit, and a new destiny. You will still face battles with sin, but no longer alone. Christ will be in you, and you will be in

Him. That is where victory begins: not in your strength, but in His. Will you turn to Him today? Will you come and be made one with the Savior who died to set you apart for God?

And to every believer, sanctification is not automatic. Yes, your position in Christ is settled, and your future glorification is sure. But the path between the two requires diligence. Are you deliberately growing in Christ, or coasting on past convictions? Are you feeding your spirit or feeding your flesh? If Christ were to return today, would you be embarrassed by anything found in your house? Would you be ashamed when He returned and you were engaged in a fleshly and sinful habit? Would you have to rush over to the TV and turn off a show? Are you being lulled into worldliness by the music you listen to? The call to be holy is not a burden, it is a privilege. God invites you to participate in His work of making you more like Jesus. Don't ignore the process. Don't neglect the means of grace. Press forward. Be intentional. Stir up your love for the Lord. Take up the next step in your spiritual walk today, not to earn His favor, but because you already have it.

Come – whether to be saved or to grow – come. Today is the day of surrender, of sanctification, of saying yes to what God is doing in you.

1. Positional Sanctification - John 17:16-17, John 17:20-23, Eph 1:3, John 1:4, Gal 2:20, 1Cor 15:22, Heb 10:10,
2. Progressive Sanctification - Matt 23:23, Isa 29:13, John 3:6-7, 2Cor 3:17-18, 1John 3:9, Gal 5:16-25 , 2Pet 1:2-10, 1Pet 1:15-16, Rom 12:2 ,
3. Perfected Sanctification - Rom 8:29