

SANCTIFICATION: THE BIBLICAL BASICS

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This introduction to the much neglected and frequently misunderstood theme of biblical sanctification serves as the foundation upon which the subsequent four essays rest and out of which they arise. First a “primer on sanctification” defines the comprehensive biblical basis for and the implications of sanctification for the Christian’s life temporally and eternally. Second, a Scriptural perspective on sanctification highlights the various patterns of sanctification in one’s Christian journey. Third, biblically emphasized particulars of sanctification help to distinguish between the past, present, and future elements of a Christian’s experience. Ultimately, this essay concludes that sanctification in its full biblical breadth encompasses a Christian’s beginning in salvation and a Christian’s continuation in growing to be like Christ which reaches perfection with a true believer’s glorification after death.

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The New Testament employs a variety of terms/expressions referring to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Most frequently used in contemporary terminology is “Christian” (χριστιανός, *Christianos*). However, this name appears in Scripture only three times (Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16). The precise connotation¹ (positive or negative) remains uncertain; however, it applies only to those who have believed in and followed the way of Christ Jesus.

A favorite term employed in the Gospels and Acts was “disciple” (μαθητής, *mathētēs*) which appears over 250 times, most often used of those who followed Christ. From its connection to “Christians” in Acts 11:26, it can be concluded that the use of “disciple” preceded that of “Christian” and, more importantly, defined a

¹Nigel Turner, *Christian Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982) 66-68.

Christian as an authentic disciple of Christ.

Throughout the NT, spiritual family imagery of the “new birth” is suggested by the frequent use of “brother” (ἀδελφός, *adelphos*) and the rare appearance of “sister” (ἀδελφή, *adelphē*; Phile 2; 2 John 13) in reference to a spiritual relationship in Christ. Another striking expression is “slave” (δοῦλος, *doulos*) in contrast to Christ as “Lord” (κύριος, *kurios*).²

Each of the above four terms seems rather appropriate and obvious. However, one additional reference to a believer is not—“saint” (ἅγιος, *hagios*). It is the most surprising, the most intriguing, and the least deserved. Used sparsely in the Gospels and Acts, “saint” is the preferred terminology in the epistles and Revelation.

Why are Christians, disciples, brothers/sisters, and slaves called “saints” or “holy ones”? They were not holy before salvation; they are not holy as God alone is during their lives on earth; and they will not be without sin until after death in heaven.³ But Scripture clearly, frequently, and emphatically declares believers to be “saints” or “sanctified ones.”

The concept of “holy” or “sanctified” serves as bookends in the canon. “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it...” (Gen 2:3). “[L]et the one who is holy, still keep himself holy” (Rev 22:11). More to the point, God commanded Moses, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev 19:2), and Peter repeated the mandate, “[B]ut like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘you shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:15-16). This idea of “separated out,” “devoted to,” and/or “holy” permeates all of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. One writer went so far as to gush, “‘Sanctification’ is one of the most resplendent words in our Christian vocabulary; and the New Testament doctrine of sanctification is one of the supreme distinctives of our Christian faith.”⁴

Why “saint”? It is the one name out of the five mentioned previously that focuses on God’s attribute of holiness (cf. Isa 6:1-8) and His design that all true believers in Christ increasingly demonstrate and emulate this quality as their certificate of Christian authenticity (cf. Heb 12:10).

² John MacArthur, *Slave: The Hidden Word That Reveals the Riches of Your Salvation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010) puts δοῦλος in proper biblical perspective (cf. Luke 17:5-10).

³ Robert L. Saucy, “‘Sinners’ Who Are Forgiven or ‘Saints’ Who Sin?” *BSAC* 152/608 (October-December 1995):400-12.

⁴ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Christian Holiness: Restudied and Restated* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) 13.

In the discussions that follow, the salvific implications⁵ of sanctification and holiness⁶ will be explored as they appear in such familiar biblical texts as:

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matt 5:48

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Rom 8:28-30

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Phil 1:6

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

1 John 3:2-3

⁵For in-depth theological discussions of sanctification, the following volumes provide some of the best helps. Joel R. Beeke, *Holiness: God's Call to Sanctification* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994). G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952). Henry W. Holloman, "Sanctification," in *Understanding Christian Theology*, eds. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003) 945-1075. Kenneth A. Lesta, "The Nature of Sanctification in the New Testament" (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University, 1979), unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 3:171-236. John F. MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word, 1993). John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) and "Sanctification (The Law)" in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Carl F.H. Henry (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962). David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (1879; repr., Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, n.d.) 15-134. Peter Toon, *Justification and Sanctification* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1983).

⁶For volumes that discuss the personal implications of "sanctification," the following works prove fruitful. Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1983) and *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1978). Richard Mayhue, *Seeking God* (Fearn, Rosshire UK: Christian Focus, 2000). Kenneth Prior, *The Way of Holiness* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1982). R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1985). A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) and *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1948).

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy.

Jude 24

A PRIMER EXPLAINING SANCTIFICATION⁷

Three distinct word groups in the NT synonymously describe “salvation” in terms of that which is past, present, and future.⁸ The following chart with representative Scripture illustrates this pattern.

⁷This essay is primarily an inductive study of “sanctification” as presented in Scripture, particularly the New Testament. Therefore, no effort has been made in this introductory essay to evaluate the various historical views that have emerged over the centuries. The following volumes do engage the range of views on “sanctification.” Donald L. Alexander, ed., *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988). Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 146-64. Charles C. Ryrie, “Contrasting Views on Sanctification” in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. by Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody, 1982) 189-200. Melvin E. Dieter, ed., *Five Views of Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987). J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1984) 121-69. Toon, *Justification*, 43-110.

⁸This synonymous pattern can be followed in Colin Brown, ed., *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978). Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976). Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

	<i>teleioō</i> <i>teleios</i>	<i>sōzō</i> <i>sōtēria</i> <i>sōtērion</i>	<i>hagiazō</i> ⁹ <i>hagiasmos</i> <i>hagios</i>
Past	<p>Heb 10:14</p> <p>“For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”</p>	<p>Titus 3:5</p> <p>“...[H]e saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...”</p>	<p>1 Cor 6:11</p> <p>“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”</p>
Present	<p>2 Cor 7:1</p> <p>“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”</p>	<p>Phil 2:12</p> <p>“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...”</p>	<p>1 Thess 4:3-4, 7</p> <p>“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.... For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”</p>

⁹The New Testament word group (ἁγιάζω, *hagiazō*) is very similar in usage to the Old Testament word group (שָׁדַשׁ, *qādash*).

Future	Heb 12:23 "...[A]nd to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect...."	Rom 13:11 "Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed."	1 Thess 5:23 "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."
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The data above can be best summarized with these ten observations/conclusions.

1. "Salvation," "sanctification," and "completion"/"perfection" are used synonymously in Scripture as word groups with significant salvific importance.
2. Salvation is part of sanctification in its broadest sense and sanctification is a part of salvation in its fullest sense.
3. Therefore, salvation and sanctification are inseparable. You cannot have one without the other.
4. Each of the three previously mentioned word groups can be used to describe the past, the present, and/or the future.
5. Each of these three word groups can be used to describe inauguration, continuation, and/or culmination in the context of redemption.
6. Each of these three word groups can be used to describe the part or the whole of salvation.
7. Unless one balances this biblical tension, then erroneous conclusions will most certainly be reached in developing a correct soteriology.
8. A person is said by Scripture already to be what a person is actually becoming.
9. A person is commanded in the Bible to be now what one cannot completely/fully be until eternity.
10. The key to maintaining clarity in the midst of possible interpretive confusion is to identify correctly the individual parts in each biblical text.

R. C. Sproul brings these great truths of justification, sanctification, and glorification into focus.

How much time elapses before the sinner begins to become pure? The answer is none. There is no time lapse between our justification and the beginning of our sanctification. But there is a great time lapse between our justification and the completion of our sanctification.

Luther used a simple analogy to explain it. He described the condition of a patient who was mortally ill. The doctor proclaimed that he had medicine that would surely cure the man. The instant the medicine was administered, the doctor declared that the patient was well. At that instant the patient was still sick, but as soon as the medicine passed his lips and entered his body the patient began to get well. So it is with our justification. As soon as we truly believe, at that very instant we start to get better; the process of becoming pure and holy is underway and its future completion is certain.¹⁰

PATTERNS DEFINING SANCTIFICATION¹¹

This introductory essay deals with sanctification in its several parts and its whole as a context for the writings that follow. By the editorial design of this issue, the subsequent articles will focus primarily, but not exclusively, upon “progressive” sanctification.

1.	Primary Divine Agents	Father 1 Thess 4:7 “For God has not called us for impurity, but in <i>sanctification</i> .”	Son 1 Cor 1:2 “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those I in Christ Jesus, called to be <i>saints</i> together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours....”	Holy Spirit 2 Thess 2:13 “But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through <i>sanctification</i> by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”
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¹⁰Sproul, *Holiness* 214.

¹¹This study has sought to proceed in the spirit of Steven L. Porter’s methodical reminder: “On the Renewal of Interest in the Doctrine of Sanctification: A Methodological Reminder,” *JETS* 45/3 (September 2002):416. “In particular, I maintain that there is a proper theo-methodological approach that addresses in a principled way doctrinal issues which are logically prior, systematically pervasive, and theologically fundamental to an evangelical theology of Christian spirituality.”

2.	Time Sequence	<p>Past 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 <i>sanctified</i>.”</p>	<p>Present 1 Thess 4:4 “[T]hat each one of you know how to control his own body in <i>holiness</i> and honor....”</p>	<p>Future 1 Thess 3:13 “[S]o that he may establish your hearts blameless in <i>holiness</i> before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”</p>
3.	Primary Means	<p>Gospel Eph 5:26 “... [T]hat he might <i>sanctify</i> her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word...”</p>	<p>Scripture John 17:17 “<i>Sanctify</i> them in the truth; your word is truth.”</p>	<p>Resurrection Rom 8:23 “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the <i>redemption</i> of our bodies.”</p>
4.	Effects	<p>Inauguration Heb 10:10 “And by that will we have been <i>sanctified</i> through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”</p>	<p>Continuation 2 Cor 7:1 “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing <i>holiness</i> to completion in the fear of God.”</p>	<p>Culmination Rev 22:11 “Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the <i>holy</i> still be <i>holy</i>.”</p>

5.	Primary Results	<p>Position Acts 26:18 “[T]o open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are <i>sanctified</i> by faith in me.”</p>	<p>Progression Rom 6:22 “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to <i>sanctification</i> and its end, eternal life.”</p>	<p>Perfection 1 Thess 3:13 “[S]o that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”</p>
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<p>6.</p>	<p>Personal Outcomes</p>	<p>Justification 1 Cor 6:11 “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were <i>sanctified</i>, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”</p>	<p>Sanctification 1 Thess 4:3 “For this is the will of God, your <i>sanctification</i>: that you abstain from sexual immorality....”</p>	<p>Glorification Rom 8:28-30 “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the first-born among many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called he also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.”</p>
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7.	Spiritual Realities	Forensic Declaration Heb 10:14 “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being <i>sanctified</i> .”	Obedient Submission Rom 6:19 “I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to <i>sanctification</i> .”	Supernatural Completion 1 Thess 5:23 “Now may the God of peace himself <i>sanctify</i> you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
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Someone might ask, “So what? This dry theology seems detached from vibrant spirituality!” But, just the opposite is true! William Ames (1576-1633), arguably the finest of Puritan theologians, rightly wrote, “Theology is the doctrine or teaching of living to God.”¹²

Systematic theology yields God’s plan for “spiritual” theology. Christian doctrine translates into Christian living. All of theology, all of Christian living can be biblically discussed, developed, and discerned in a very real sense by beginning with what the Bible says about “sanctification.” The concept of sanctification could be considered the “alpha and omega” of redemption.

PASSAGES ILLUSTRATING SANCTIFICATION

This section allows Scripture to speak for itself concerning the three time perspectives of sanctification: positional, progressive, and perfective.

Inauguration—Positional

1. 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*.”

¹²William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (1629; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) 77.

2. Acts 26:18

“[T]o open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are *sanctified* by faith in me.”

3. 1 Cor 1:2

“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those *sanctified* in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours....”

4. 1 Cor 1:30

“And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and *sanctification* and redemption....”

5. 1 Cor 6:11

“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were *sanctified*, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

6. Eph 5:26

“[T]hat he might *sanctify* her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word....”

7. 1 Thess 4:7

“For God has not called us for impurity, but in *holiness*.”

8. 2 Thess 2:13

“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through *sanctification* by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”

9. Heb 10:10

“And by that will we have been *sanctified* through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

10. Heb 10:14

“For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being *sanctified*.”

11. Heb 12:14

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the *holiness* without which no one will see the Lord.”

12. 1 Pet 1:2

“...[A]ccording to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the *sanctification* of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.”

Continuation—Progressive

1. John 17:17

“*Sanctify* them in the truth; your word is truth.”

2. Rom 6:19

“I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to *sanctification*.”

3. Rom 6:22

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to *sanctification* and its end, eternal life.”

4. 2 Cor 7:1

“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing *holiness* to completion in the fear of God.”

5. 1 Thess 4:3

“For this is the will of God, your *sanctification*: that you abstain from sexual immorality....”

6. 1 Thess 4:4

“[T]hat each one of you know how to control his own body in *holiness* and honor....”

7. 2 Tim 2:21

“Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as *holy*, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.”

8. Rev 22:11

“Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the *holy* still be *holy*....”

Culmination—Perfective

1. 1 Thess 3:13

“[S]o that he may establish your hearts blameless in *holiness* before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”

2. 1 Thess 5:23

“Now may the God of peace himself *sanctify* you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

PRINCIPLES SUMMARIZING SANCTIFICATION

1. A salvific work inaugurated by God and participated in by all three members of the Godhead.
2. A salvific work that is continued by God in this life unto completion in heaven.
3. A salvific work that cannot be separated from salvation and/or glorification.¹³
4. A salvific work of God that is empowered by God's Word and God's Spirit.
5. A salvific work of God which once begun cannot be lost, stopped, or undone.
6. A salvific work of God that prompts a holy response of biblical obedience from those who are genuine saints.
7. A salvific work of God that does not eradicate sin from the believer until glorification.
8. A salvific work that provides confident hope in this life because of a certain eternal hope in the next life.

Almost four centuries past, Thomas Watson wrote eloquently about the primacy and centrality of sanctification in Scripture and in the Christian life,

¹³Ryle, *Holiness* 30. “In what, then, are justification and sanctification alike: a. Both proceed originally from the free grace of God. It is of His gift alone that believers are justified or sanctified at all. b. Both are part of that great work of salvation which Christ, in the eternal covenant, has undertaken on behalf of His people. Christ is the fountain of life, from which pardon and holiness both flow. The root of each is Christ. c. Both are to be found in the same persons. Those who are justified are always sanctified, and those who are sanctified are always justified. God has joined them together, and they cannot be put asunder. d. Both begin at the same time. The moment a person begins to be a justified person, he also begins to be a sanctified person. He may not feel it, but it is a fact. e. Both are alike necessary to salvation. No one ever reached heaven without a renewed heart as well as forgiveness, without the Spirit's grace as well as the blood of Christ, without a meetness for eternal glory as well as a title. The one is just as necessary as the other.”

The main thing a Christian should look after is sanctification. This is the *unum necessarium*, “the one thing needful.” Sanctification is our purest complexion, it makes us as the heaven, bespangled with stars; it is our nobility, by it we are born of God, and partake of the divine nature; it is our riches, therefore compared to rows of jewels, and chains of gold.¹⁴

¹⁴Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, rev.ed. (1692 repr.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965) 247.